

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 346 798

HE 045 618

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TITLE Course Teams. Understanding Course Teams:
Organization and Dynamics (Report No. 62). Workshops
and Seminars on Team Work: 1978-1991 (Report No. 63).
Development of a Course Team (Report No. 65).
INSTITUTION Open Univ., Walton, Bletchley, Bucks (England). Inst.
of Educational Technology.
PUB DATE 92
NOTE 70p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141) -- Guides - Non-Classroom
Use (055)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC03 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS College Faculty; *Consultation Programs; Course
Organization; Curriculum Development; *Group
Dynamics; *Group Experience; Higher Education; *Human
Relations; *Interprofessional Relationship;
Postsecondary Education; Teacher Workshops; Team
Teaching; *Team Training
IDENTIFIERS Open University (Great Britain); *Process
Consultation

ABSTRACT

The three reports combined here examine a workshop/seminar consultancy program for college faculty on the dynamics of course teams and group process in course development. The consultancy program focused on the hidden influences of groups and the relationship between individual and institutional change. These three reports: (1) examine the experiences of the group dynamics workshop that was conducted with an Open University French course team in October of 1991; (2) trace what was learned between 1978 and 1991 when attempting to apply process focused consultancy to more educational activities; and (3) discuss the dynamics of the course team and how it contributed to the development of a team and the progress of work. Included are examples of the projection of anxieties, difficulties in thinking through the implications of actions, and inhibitions about decisions involving risk or change. Also included are a list of workshops and seminars held from 1978 through 1991; a list of internal papers and their focus; and course team meeting notes. (GLR)

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ED346798

Understanding course teams: organization and dynamics

Report No 62

Workshops and seminars on team work: 1978-1991

Report No 63

Development of a course team

Teaching and Consultancy Centre

Report No 65

by Robert Nicodemus

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The Teaching and Consultancy Centre is part of the Open University's Institute of Educational Technology.

Its aims are:

- 1. To help improve student learning in the University by advising and assisting Faculties, Schools, Continuing Education, University Committees and groups, as appropriate. A chief concern is the accessibility and teaching effectiveness of course materials, to which the Centre contributes through its work on course teams: through research; course planning, policy making and working methods; critical reading of draft materials, and the evaluation of courses.**
- 2. To maintain a knowledge base for the above activities by helping to research problems in the OU learning system and by recording experience in course teams and on committees, and also to encourage innovatory solutions and practices.**
- 3. To provide consultancy and training, inside the OU and on a contract basis with outside organisations, based on the staff's wide experience in distance education and open learning. On this same basis, to chair course teams and write course materials, and to 'transform' materials produced by external contributors into high quality distance teaching material.**

FOREWORD

Eighteen months prior to the first presentation of a course is a very relevant time for a course team to consider the possible effects of group dynamics on their work. By this time they will have a more detailed view of the course, having seen most of the first drafts of the correspondence texts. For the next nine months they will have a particularly hectic schedule to get through discussing at least two drafts of most texts and beginning hand over for production. At this time many of the difficulties in relationships inside and outside the team may emerge. How team members may deal with problems is considered here.

UNDERSTANDING COURSE TEAMS: ORGANIZATION AND DYNAMICS

BY ROBERT NICODEMUS

Introduction

Beginning work in an Open University (OU) course team can be particularly difficult for a new member of staff. The French course team began work in the autumn of 1991 soon after the creation of the Centre for Modern Languages (CML). All of the six lecturers were new to the OU and only one of the three course managers had previous experience of the position. This gave a unique opportunity to discuss with new staff the complexity of the course development process just two months after they started work. This report draws upon the experiences of a workshop on 'group dynamics' I conducted for the French course team (23 October 1991). Some ideas are further clarified in this report, especially what team members can do about some problems.

By the time I presented the workshop, the French course team was already well into their own programme of familiarisation with the OU - individuals, committees, departments, policy and procedures. One effect of the workshop was to shift their perspective towards demands they could make on the system rather than just responding to demands from the system. The complexity of the system makes it difficult to discern what is fixed and what is adaptable. To understand the tensions and dynamics between organization, group and individual, some theory is helpful and one I have found useful over the past thirteen years has a long history of application by the Tavistock Institute of Human Relations. A psychodynamic theory may help to place stress and conflict in the context of learning, development of a team as well as possible impact on course content and presentation. The theory also implies a method for clarifying events as they happen in team meetings although not every one may see this as helpful at the time. A team experiencing difficulties may first turn to its own human resources for solutions but recognizing how unconscious processes are expressed may be difficult. Later in this report I will be giving some examples of the projection of anxieties, difficulties thinking through the implications of actions and inhibitions about decisions, risks or change.

Organization

A very brief and generalized view of the entire process of course planning, development, production and presentation is outlined in this section. Activities spread over years give an idea of how long the process can take. There is considerable variation between course teams as well as continual change of many kinds in the system. For more details one must consult the Course Production Handbook last published in 1987 with the next edition due in 1992. It will incorporate additional materials produced over the past five years.

In February 1992 twenty two new undergraduate courses (out of a total of 135) were available to Open University (OU) students. By this time the course teams may have been meeting for three years and will have passed through three important transition points. First, the planning process which began in 1986 ends with the first formal course team meeting, perhaps as early as February 1989. Second, about two years later in February 1991 correspondence texts begin to be handed over for production i.e. for editing, graphic design and printing. Soon after first presentation in February 1992 the final materials will be handed over and the 'development' team becomes a smaller 'presentation' or maintenance team. This third transition point is usually celebrated.

Within the three year period of course development there is a nine month period of particularly intense work. During this time the team will discuss at least two drafts of most of the correspondence texts. For our 1992 courses this intense period would have started about eighteen months earlier in September 1990 and ended about May 1991. For a full credit course with 32 texts or units an average of more than two units every week may be discussed over this nine month period with the greatest modifications of units often made at the second draft stage.

As a team progresses through development, work also begins on other components of the course i.e. set readers which course team members will edit, audio visual materials (TV,, radio and cassettes) developed with the BBC, supplementary printed material (course and tutor guides, continuous assessment material), kits (including use of computers) and summer schools. Along side the academic work is the approval of resources required by the different course components, filling in forms for the information of the committees who must try to balance resources requested with the total resource available. Approval of specific resource details begins about three years before

presentation and may require two years to complete at least two submissions to the committees.

In addition to attending to all these details, course team members may also be working on other courses or committees as well as trying to continue their own research and publications.

University committees are an important feature in course development and production. There are at least nine separate committees which teams submit information about resources to for approval. With the use of computer spreadsheets, filling in forms has become a very demanding and complex task necessitating the creation of many written guides supplementary to the Course Production Handbook. Administrators and clerks make an essential contribution here, often writing the guides, managing the relationship between the course team and committees as well as coordinating many of the systems which help progress work. Although the work of academics may be more public through the course, they make up only about one-fifth of all staff. The largest single group, the secretaries, make up about two-fifth of the total. In addition there is a very diverse group of staff essential to maintaining the total system.

Sources and focus of problems

Although course development is very demanding and sometimes stressful, most people find it challenging and satisfying. Most of the time the system appears to work well. Many of the tensions which do occur are related to a few inherent conflicts e.g. between individuals, team and organizations over control of schedules, between high expectation for courses and the limitations of resources or between academic quality and teaching effectiveness. External pressures come from many sources such as peers in other universities, Government and from the diverse and high expectations of students.

Difficulties within a team or between a team and colleagues outside are often attributed to personality, especially when the importance of the issue does not seem to justify the level of difficulty experienced. Past experiences may lead to serious concern about disruption of work with consequences for the quality of a course. Help might be sought by individual team members or the entire team. In 1981 I was in the position to respond to such requests because of training I had begun in 1978 at the Tavistock Clinic and other places. Many of my observations

in this report derive from twenty three consultancy contracts within the OU which were influenced by psychodynamic theory and method.

Staff who are trying facilitate the process of course development and production may become the focus of a variety of problems about, for example, personal conflict, managing tasks, inhibition of work, confusion about procedures, forgetting ordinary social conventions or making critical comments before summarizing what has been achieved. Such difficulties appear to serve two related functions - the development of the team and resolution of anxieties about relationships which are at a distance. Individuals make use of relationships which are available to resolve anxieties about those which are not directly available, particularly pertaining to students. Resolving anxieties enables the development of interdependence within the team, integration of the team and tasks within a very complex system and the emergence of some creativity in process and products.

Responding to problems

Team members are often aware of what is happening in a meeting but can not see how speaking about problems could possibly help. When they are enabled to look beyond personalities or outside the team for explanations, they are more likely to be listened to and ideas shared about understanding their experiences. However, the more one attempts to get in touch with group processes, the more they may have an impact on one's ability to think and learn e.g. boundaries confused, anxieties acted out and progress inhibited. Describing such experiences may contribute to better awareness of what team members appear to inflict on each other as well as what the organization appears to inflict on them. Finding out about and testing out what appears to be so, what is imagined and what is real, is perhaps the main focus of any enquiry into group processes. Although a team can give an individual permission to comment on the processes in the team and undertake to be supportive, there will always be resistance to and defenses against this process. Consequently some support may be needed from outside the team, an individual or group to help talk through the experiences. It is the creating of 'safe' places for such enquiries which appears to be most difficult to realize in institutions and I will consider this further after we look at the context in more detail.

Context

To place possible difficulties within a real situation, I will take the French course team as an example. The first French course is scheduled for presentation in February 1994, about two and one-half years after the course team began meeting late in 1991. Although this seems time enough, their progress though some of the OU committees will be hurried since resource approval usually begins earlier. Team members also missed out on the lengthy process of course planning which usually begins six years before presentation (or in 1988). The Centre for Modern Languages did not even exist until 1991 so team members may feel stuck with earlier decisions reinforcing anxieties about working in a "machine like" unresponsive environment, an apparent feature of complex systems. However, the October 1991 workshop on group dynamics was well ahead of the period of even more intense scheduling, possibly beginning mid 1992.

Not only do development and production systems evolve, major changes may be in progress and one of the most important at this time (early 1992) is the loss of OU based BBC studio facilities because of budget cuts. It is too early to say how this may affect the preparation of the French courses, especially since they will begin development of three additional (1/2 credit) courses over the next three years. Such intense scheduling may prove to be very difficult.

As I mentioned earlier, a large proportion of OU staff are committed to facilitating the primary task of the institution, to educate and conduct research to progress our knowledge - including how the institution works. In reality all staff perform management tasks as well as whatever enquiries are needed for self development and improvement of work. Although staff may be based in different places such as in Administration or a Faculty, distinctions become focused when their perspective of work become polarized in favour of *either* the institution *or* the individual. Sometimes the chair of a course team will seem to represent the institution in trying to keep individuals to schedules. Sometimes administrators or clerks will try to facilitate relationships rather than conformity to institutional procedure. Between organization procedures and individual idiosyncrasy are the spontaneous experiences we live through and for.

Because the focus of this report is on course development, there is an emphasis here on facilitating course related tasks by staff outside course teams. From their perspective maintaining the functioning of their own departments and the fabric

of the institution is just as important. The work of Academic Administration (AA), Finance, Personnel, Academic Computer Services and Business Development Office is only vaguely implied by their name. No one outside could have much of an idea about the variety of their tasks or the unforgiving schedules they must maintain. For example, the Secretariat division of AA coordinates the committees concerned with courses as well as scheduling the system. The Students division of AA organizes everything to do with students, including course examinations and residential schools. Admission of students to the OU is being mostly devolved to the thirteen regional offices. More obscure, if only through name, are Management Services (administrative computers), Operations (graphic design, publishing and distribution) and Regional Academic Services (representing thirteen regional offices). A course team will have contact with individuals from many of these divisions at different times over the three years of development, the year of production and up to ten or more years of presentation.

Academic work is based in the ten Faculties (including Centre, Schools, Institutes) and the Library. The BBC/OUPC (OU Production Centre) is part of the BBC and works in partnership with the OU.

The centre/periphery split between "Walton Hall" in Milton Keynes where most staff work and the thirteen Regional Offices is one source of tension which we will not explore here. Different tasks such as administrative and academic may present another focus for expressing and resolving anxieties. Others will be referred to through the following summary, again with reference to the 1994 presentation of the first course in French and the CML (Centre for Modern Languages). Although contacts between the team and others may begin prior to the year indicated below, only the year in which greatest involvement related to a 1994 presentation is indicated.

The course process - four stages

1. Course planning 1988-1991
 - a. approval- Academic Board, Course Development Committee, CML
 - b. subsequent courses- French 2,3, 4 (and other CML languages 1993 - ?)
2. Course development 1991-1995
 - a. course team (chair, manager, members, editor, BBC producer) secretaries, consultants, external assessor, IET contributions

- b. course content - academic (knowledge about France and language awareness) and teaching (use or language fluency)
 - c. resource approval- Course Resources Subcommittee, Broadcasting and Audio-visual Subcommittee, Collaborative Publishing Subcommittee, Teaching and Counselling Committee, Examinations and Assessment Committee, Residential Schools Committee
 - d. scheduling- Administration, Project Control, Course manager
(Begin hand over to Operations February 1993)
- 3. Course Production 1993-1995
 - a. Operations (editing, graphic design, printing, warehouse, distribution)
- 4. Course presentation 1994-?
 - a. presentation course team
 - b. regions- RAS (Regional Academic Services, Regional Centres). Tuition - students, part-time tutors, study centres, summer schools
 - c. centre - AA (students) Examination and Assessment Boards, Examinations Office, external examiners
 - d. course evaluation- including IET survey research

In this summary I have not attempted to identify individual staff outside the team and their contribution to course presentation such as the Senior Counsellor and Staff Tutors based in the Regional Centres. Staff tutors are often members of course teams as well as being responsible for the part-time tutors.

Even at this early point some members of the French course team are concerned about long-term career prospects. Like many other OU staff, they are brought in on temporary contracts for a specific course. There is a big question about being valued here, especially since the ordinary feedback from students is missing. So will short term contracts become permanent? This question will become more urgent as time passes, the more so for staff who suffer from ambiguity about role. Specifically, course team members will find difficulty shifting from a position of authority to one of dependence i.e. from being experts to being learners and trying to think themselves into the position of a learner at a distance. As I suggested earlier, associated anxieties can become exaggerated, articulated and acted out through relationships within the team. This can aid team development but can also effect work. IET staff who work with course teams traditionally represent concerns about teaching and this may be perceived as in opposition to academic excellence, if only unconsciously.

To briefly summarize some obvious sources of tension associated to the four stages of *the course process* above - 1. short-term/permanent 2a. individual/team, OU/BBC control 2b. teacher/writer, academic/teaching, knowledge/use, ideals/reality 2c. academic/administration 3. demands/support 4b. centre/periphery 4c. course requirements/tutor discretion 4d. hopes/disappointment 4e. success/failure, learning/judgement.

Without direct experience of working in an OU course team, it is difficult to appreciate the excitement of the relationships or the power in the problems which may emerge. An experienced member of course teams may readily recall instances in which colleagues were drawn into some of the tensions summarized above. Without this experience it is difficult to bring specific instances alive, especially since underlying emotions may be hidden or the issues seem unreal. Invariably, difficulties which are more overt are surprising. It is impossible to predict who will be vulnerable, who the group will unconsciously elicit to act out the tensions or what point in the course process may be relevant. It would be convenient if there was an orderly unfolding of anxieties directly related to the time and space of the course process e.g. as the team responds to the, apparently, orderly demands of the institution for information. With the passage of time more diverse groups who are more distant have to be considered with more tasks integrated into the system. It may be useful to have a model in mind, of dynamics as well as the organization, on which to hang specific problems as they emerge.

A simple model is likely to be more useful in those moments one becomes the focus of tensions which are difficult to uncover, resolve or there is resistance to seeing.

First, I want to make a distinction between reflection and spontaneity. Managing work and systems in an institution requires continual reflection about organization in relation to a specific, individual and unique situation. Opportunity for spontaneous relationships may become limited because tasks have to be completed by a certain time. Individuals may be encouraged to represent an extreme- *either* close, responsive and tolerant of uncertainty *or* distant, unresponsive and controlled. Because course team members have considerable experience working within a dynamic situation which is sometime punitive, thoughtless and chaotic, they may be seen as volatile and open to taking risks in relationships. These are the seeds for stereotyping between, for

example, administrators and academics - the former tied to their desks, schedules and operational demands yet expected to be infinitely flexible and tolerant of recalcitrant academics who, in turn, are struggling for control of their own work and the demands made upon them. Thus, academics may be resented for their apparent freedom, to come and go as they wish and spending the minimum of time in the office. Such views were strongly expressed in a workshop I offered on team work some time ago. Before the workshop there was some resistance to combining academic with administrative and clerical staff in the same work shop for fear that some would be intimidated. Indeed, although secretaries were invited none attended even though, individually, many have strong opinions about relationships at work as well as how to improve them.

Much of the satisfaction in work derives from the availability of spontaneous relationships where one may risk being truthful. For me the term experiential refers to the "here and now" rather than the "there and then" of reflection. It is interesting that "experiential" is sometimes used to represent the sum total of experiences a person has had, thus breaking down any differences. Such obscuring of the boundaries which separate and clarify differences between tasks and people is one of three ways to describe the dynamics within any group, between groups or within an individual.

Understanding dynamics

Boundaries, containment and development refer to a three level model useful for understanding dynamics in relationships. Readers familiar with psycho-analytic theory or its application to institutions by the Tavistock Institute of Human Relations will recognize the sources which influenced many of the following ideas.

1. Boundaries - something which separates inside from outside or differences, between people. e.g. developing a point of view from one perspective, of one's self as separate and different from another. To avoid anxiety one's own knowledge and skill may be relocated or projected outside into some other person or place with the result that differences become exaggerated or the boundary between inside and outside not clear. 'Dependency' or the effective loss of one's own capabilities, worries and responsibilities may delay problem solving until the reality of differences or stereotyping is tested out.

2. Containment - may be described as the space between a thought and an action where reflection and spontaneity are held momentarily within a dynamic tension. Tensions are an external expression of an internal state of conflict between mind and body, thoughts or actions and a lack of harmony between them. Because thoughts acted out prematurely are also communications, as in 'flight /fight' behaviour, problems provide an opportunity for learning from experience where there is a commitment to engage with the here-and-now of team meetings, risking spontaneity as well as reflecting on events from a distance.
3. Development - builds upon the previous two stages, where clarity about differences enables the formation of symbols, where thinking is separated from actions and contained inside a relevant place at the time e.g. individual or group. Processes which clarify space and time (inside/outside, cause/effect) now move from things and what happens to them to a question of ultimate significance i.e. of new life evolving out of death or the birth of something (idea or being) unique, separate and independent. Development may be prevented or reversed by 'pairing' when people collude to avoid change (a technical meaning of pairing).

There are a number of difficulties in applying this three level model to a specific situation at the time. It is difficult to maintain one's own perspective when involved in an event or to find support to clarify what is going on. Relationships and issues are so complex that all three levels usually exist simultaneously. So how does one identify when there is a problem and attend to the details sufficiently so that the fundamental issue may be focused on?

From my experiences of working with many kinds of teams as well as individuals, my first clues are often very vague, an uncomfortable and vague tension focused inside myself. A number of questions will begin to emerge -

1. There is something unfair going on. Is someone being caused to express anxieties on the behalf of others?
2. Inhibited decisions and exaggerated conflicts which are sustained or rapidly alternating seem unjustified. Are there causes from outside, less easily seen, that are not being thought about?

3. Help being offered actually seems disruptive. What changes or developments are being avoided?

Specific examples are endless but tensions in the following examples focus on the team, the institution and peers outside. They are taken from a team I worked with in a role of consultancy on group processes.

A senior member of the team (a "Reader") who felt that he was "no good in groups" was consistently late with his drafts and not clear about when they would be available. In part, he was expressing worries, not articulated by the team, about controlling one's own conditions of work, autonomy vrs being a member of the team and accepting its demands. The chair had difficulty managing the team, getting decisions made and work progressed. To the team he seemed to represent the institution, the demands it made and worries about the resources available necessary for success. By making him feel de-skilled team members felt more in control and the team a more distinct entity in a complex situation. In a later meeting a team member (who was based in the regions) submitted a draft text in which a substantial piece from a published book was included without being acknowledged. His plagiarism, which he found bewildering, appeared to represent anxiety about failure, of criticism from peers outside and possible failure by students if the course materials were not good enough. Team members who are based outside the centre may experience many kinds of difficulties which appear to be associated with clarifying, unconsciously, boundaries of the team. Some of the tensions were repeatedly expressed over a number of meetings, interfering with work yet, in my opinion, eventually facilitating team work - a important perspective from which to approach any intervention. In one meeting discussion became stuck in concerns about past policies which the chair found almost impossible to stop, again reflecting concern about future success. The most complex difficulties involved the BBC producer who became paired up with the "Reader" in excluding the team from information about a script, if only unconsciously. The resentment caused reflected past conflicts about who controlled selection of TV presenters as well as worries about what the American co-producers would do with the materials later.

In these brief descriptions I cannot begin to convey the level of emotions associated with them. Obviously such difficulties contribute to the development of the team by the opportunity to resolve anxieties but at considerable cost to

individuals who may physically drop out of the team (as three did in the example above) or become unable to be productive members. Such consequences are not usually visible outside a team because others step in and do extra work.

My focus on events inside the team neglects those outside the team - individuals in administration or committees, in Faculties or other departments. In the OU many people are expected to take on responsibility far beyond those which would be expected in other institutions. Ambiguities about tasks and responsibilities, when one makes or responds to requests and how strong they may be, is diffused by the convivial first name atmosphere of cooperation. Disappointments rarely expressed appear to be indirectly resolved through the dynamics in the system. Organizational structures become the focus of tensions and their increasing complexity may be an expression of institutional defenses against anxieties which cannot be publicly discussed.

In the workshop with the French course team, I brought in some alternative perspectives to help focus on the dynamics within situations rather than be distracted by an excessive numbers of examples.

Other perspectives

Because the context of OU work is so dominated by print, words in texts as well as those relating to management of the system, reference to a discipline not dependent on words may be helpful. I drew upon Veronica Sherborne's work with children (Development Movement for Children. Cambridge University Press, 1990) to relate to the three level model above.

1. Boundaries. Directions - one way or two way, exploring the limits of space, high or low on the floor, close or distant to another, values, curiosity.
2. Containment. Energy - strong or gentle, quick or slow, resistance or giving in, alternating from one to another, points of balance between falling over and going on.
3. Development. Flow- flexible, controlled and free, a story unfolding in its significance.

TV is an art form which also draws upon a variety of senses, combining associations from the body with more abstract symbols. A second perspective drawn from a BBC producer (Jack Koumi "Narrative screen writing for

educational television: a framework" I. of Educational Television - in press) was less successful because of the increased complexity of the medium. Koumi uses the term "hook" to describe the beginning of a TV programme, to create suspense, excite by varying load, pace and depth but I would place this under containment here where I see more dynamic processes located. His "signposts" seem to fit more easily under boundaries signaling what is next or what to look for and the values which influence behaviour. Finally, I would place his "consolidate, recapitulate and extrapolate" under Development where ideas evolve spontaneously, without expectation, planning or control. Although the BBC analogy seems less clear, one can never anticipate what associations may be sparked off in someone trying to make sense of the dynamics in education.

Because I have recently applied these ideas in a 1992 course (EM 236 Learning and Teaching Mathematics) I suggested that shape, position and movement were also closely related to the three levels above. Because this perspective made sense to the members of the EM 236 team, I will risk extending it now a little further.

In our focus on three levels, boundaries, containment and development, two physical dimensions of space and time combine with a mental one of ideas to provide the context for relationships. The idea of a boundary in space separating inside from outside, is extended by that of time, where a second space follows the first with possible alteration of a boundary. Events progress through some containing space in the "middle" of things but which is also different, from a beginning to an end. Boundaries separate different perspectives and in a different kind of dimension, time, separate events may be thought about.

Western and Japanese art provide a useful analogy. The perspective of a single observer includes a vanishing point at some point of travel over time through space. Eighteenth century Japanese art, in contrast, presents two separate and different perspectives at the same time, one with the observer looking down on a scene and the other looking from the same level. The two perspectives are simultaneous and do not require movement in time i.e. a student moving from a position of dependence to authority and independence. The ability to consider a 'double perspective' has advantages in team work i.e. being able to accept mixed or ambivalent feelings in contrast to the need for simplicity and choosing just one perspective or being able to look at the draft of a correspondence text from different perspectives - writer, critical reader and student.

To return to examples from the OU, it may be useful to consider differences in the kinds of issues which may come up in different locations, for example, summer schools compared to course teams. I will now relate issues of gender, age and generation (parent/child) to the idea of boundaries, containment and development.

In my experience, issues of gender, age and generation rarely provide a focus of tension in course teams. These issues do become a focus of conflict in summer schools, probably because it is a place sufficiently distant from one's work place or personal life to take risks. Gender, age and generation also define some of the most important aspects of one's own identity which is continually forming. Work also make a significant contribution to one's sense of worth and summer schools provide the only place where so many separate parts of the institution come together at one time. Because it lasts only for a week and has a clear beginning and ending (in contrast to the distant sense of time and space in course preparation) anxieties are expressed and resolved with extreme efficiency i.e. dramatically. Unfortunately, the few staff who risk studying this phenomena and documenting it get little support from colleagues and, apparently, almost none from those in positions of management responsibility. For the relevant academic disciplines, social sciences, it is difficult to distance oneself objectively from what one is part of without becoming disconnected. And, in any case, the purpose of summer schools is to make up for what one has not been able to teach through the OU media as well as compensate for the lack of direct personal contact. Learning from experience in summer school has a restricted meaning institutionally but an expansive one for individuals in it.

This brief look into summer school may help make the point that it is difficult to learn about the dynamics underlying relationships at the time they occur in course teams. Committing a few minutes at the end of meetings for "process comments" (reflecting on events rather than decisions), will help check out reality in contrast to appearances or unshared fantasies. The perceptions of different individuals constitute a unique and invaluable resource for understanding what is going on at all levels, especially the impact of the institution on work. Personality is not a proper topic for discussion, especially since individual differences are inevitably exploited by a group in an effort to avoid anxieties.

Finally, I will return briefly to the importance of spontaneous relationships in a distance teaching institution. Not needing to manipulate, justify or be certain about outcomes will favour spontaneous relationships at work and may help compensate for relationships which are missing, especially with students. In my opinion, the growing emphasis in new courses on ideas such as the "reflective practitioner", can be an avoidance of facing the pain of missing relationships as well as the emotions essential to learning. Teaching and learning appears to be idealized by an excessive emphasis on objective distance, delayed responses with a neglect of dynamics in relationships - particularly the difficulty of staying in touch with ambivalent feelings. The ethos of "higher" in education is of reason over emotion, looking down from a superior perspective on the mortals who are facing away from each other.

Making aims explicit, accepting limitations and mistakes without excessive guilt and taking risks all help in forming new and interdependent relationships with their potential for creativity. One must not forget that the idea of containment includes the painful and distressing extremes of behaviour and points to the infinitely clever ways containment will be avoided. The commitment to understand all behaviour as forms of communicating what one may not be consciously aware of or able to think about will help a team to learn from what is being experienced at the time, testing out ideas at the time rather than just reflecting on them afterwards.

Questions

After brief introductions at the beginning of the workshop, we discussed a list of questions which were related to the three level model of boundaries, containment and development. The list, slightly modified below, can help open up discussion about staff and students in a distance education environment.

Inside

1. Will my past experiences be sufficient to succeed in this new situation?
2. Will my efforts be appreciated?
3. Dare I say what I feel as well as what I think?
4. What about the days I do not feel confident?
5. Can I understand difficulties others are having?

Relationships

6. Will I have enough support to complete tasks successfully?
7. Can others be trusted to do their part?
8. Can I be effective under pressure - spontaneous, patient and tolerated?
9. How much compromise may be needed?

Change

10. Can we achieve our/others ideals?
11. How will our work compare with others?
12. Can we apply to distance teaching what we learn about team work?

Reflections on the workshop

Towards the end of the workshop for the French course team we considered possible follow-up. It became clear then that they had already arranged to see three colleagues from IET (Reg Melton, Barbara Hodgson and Diana Laurillard). Although I was pleased about this initiative I was, yet again, concerned about the lack of discussions about consultancy in IET. Although there is considerable information about who is doing what, on going discussions are the best way to clarify problems in the system. My view about the need for more talking is influenced by the usefulness I found in the 'case study' discussions in the Tavistock 'Consulting to institutions workshop'. In the OU, finding yet more time for meetings appears to be almost impossible.

As Gordon Lawrence pointed out in the internal 1979 IET Tavistock Report (shared with the team later), the work of IET staff tends to be private and not shared with colleagues. Over the past thirteen years I have come to see this as a form of protection against the ambivalent feelings of many OU staff towards IET. Since consultancy may be more effective when it focuses on the sources of tensions, a consultant may become a focus of projected feelings. My recommendation to focus on group dynamics obviously carries some risks. Consequently, enquiries into dynamics should be either supervised or supported by a discussion group.

The request from the French course team to IET for a workshop on group dynamics did not come from any information the team might have read nor recommendation from within the OU. Because the husband of one of the course team members works in management, he was aware of the importance of this area and mentioned it to his wife, Jenny Ollerenshaw. So my opportunity to offer

a workshop appears to have been rather accidental. Writing this report was made possible in part because I had at least one audience to think about, members of the French course team, with whom I had shared a very significant experience. Writing for a distant audience may be far more difficult than direct teaching and the dynamics in teams doubt brings the experience alive, exciting as well as alarming.

The team had evidently not thought about inviting the Editor, BBC producer or the secretaries. This is not a criticism, especially since team members have enough to think about concerning resources as well as course content and structure. However, it can be difficult to be aware of support that might be needed by anyone working with a team as well as members in it, especially when problems are vague or slowly emergent. There was hope that a member of the CML management team might appear during the workshop but did not. The physical separation of the team's offices in temporary buildings from the CML appeared to accentuate feelings of isolation and concern about being valued. At the end the team appreciated the fact that I kept to my schedule and ended when I said I would, evidence of the pressures they must feel at this early point of familiarisation with the OU and awareness of how important schedules will be for them, especially when so many decisions seem already to have been made before they joined. I recommended that the secretaries be briefed on what was discussed in the workshop.

Of two readings I suggested, one had been originally published in French, thus influencing my decision to include it (F. Roustang. Dire Mastery. Discipleship from Freud to Lacan. translated from "Un destin si funeste" Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982). The second reading suggested is replaced here by another one - R. Britton "Keeping things in mind" In Clinical Lectures on Klein and Bion. ed. by R. Anderson. Tavistock/Routledge, 1992.

Appendix

Outline for the workshop

1. Beginnings
2. Context - a picture of course development
3. How team develop - making the unconscious overt through consultancy.
4. Words and dynamics - alternative frameworks
5. What group dynamics tell us about learning - a psycho-dynamic conflict theory
6. Learning at a distance - review of ideas
7. Follow-up

Staff attending the workshop (French course team members)

Marie-Noëlle Lamy (Chair), David Hare, Kevin Firth, Marie-Pierre Détraz, Jenny Ollerenshaw, Hélène Mulphin. Course managers - Ghislaine Adams, Gail Baron, Ruth McCracken

Other associated staff

Kate Laughton (Editor), Betty Talks (BBC producer)

French course team secretaries - Marie-Claude Bovet, Margaret Selby

Centre for Modern Languages - Stephanie Rybak (Director), Anne Stevens (Deputy), Tessa Holroyde (Assistant Secretary), Stevie Lansdown (Secretary)

Workshops and seminars on team work: 1978-1991

by Robert Nicodemus

1992

Institute of Educational Technology
The Open University, Milton Keynes MK7 6AA



The Teaching and Consultancy Centre is part of the Open University's Institute of Educational Technology.

Its aims are:

1. **To help improve student learning in the University by advising and assisting Faculties, Schools, Continuing Education, University Committees and groups, as appropriate. A chief concern is the accessibility and teaching effectiveness of course materials, to which the Centre contributes through its work on course teams: through research; course planning, policy making and working methods; critical reading of draft materials, and the evaluation of courses.**
2. **To maintain a knowledge base for the above activities by helping to research problems in the OU learning system and by recording experience in course teams and on committees, and also to encourage innovatory solutions and practices.**
3. **To provide consultancy and training, inside the OU and on a contract basis with outside organisations, based on the staff's wide experience in distance education and open learning. On this same basis, to chair course teams and write course materials, and to 'transform' materials produced by external contributors into high quality distance teaching material.**

FOREWORD

This review of workshops and seminars traces how I attempted to apply what I and colleagues learned from process focused consultancy (reviewed in TCC report No 61) to more educational activities.

WORKSHOPS AND SEMINARS ON TEAM WORK: 1978 - 1991

Introduction

Workshops and seminars provide the presenter with an opportunity to clarify his ideas, test them out with colleagues and disseminate them more widely inside and outside the institution. Dissemination is particularly important for an 'in-house' institutional research and development unit like IET. If ideas are not made easily available they are less likely to be used and, to the extent the work of IET is not useful, justification for its existence is weakened. A list of fifty workshops and seminars is given in Appendix A.

The purpose of this report is to review some of the ideas from my workshops and seminars and consider what they may have contributed to the OU in particular and distance education in general. In writing this report I am very aware that, until recently, the ideas have not been very accessible except through a few publications (listed in TCC report No 61 'Process consultancy within the Open University 1981 - 1991'. Now I have written a series of eleven TCC reports (listed at the end) in which most of my work over the past thirteen years is summarized. IET does have an 'Information Bank' where documents may be deposited but they are not easily identified or, evidently, often withdrawn and used. Unpublished internal papers can also be an important form of communication and I have included some of mine in Appendix B. These two Appendices combined with the one in TCC report No 61 give a fairly comprehensive over-view of my work in IET, details of which may help answer some questions about the relationship between individual and institutional change.

There are a number of reasons why it has taken so long for my work to become more accessible to a wider audience. Some of my early papers and reports are difficult to read because of my excessive emphasis on psychodynamic theory. Too often I have tried to fit the facts into the structure of a theory rather than letting it inform a clear story line. One difficulty in writing academic papers is that they may lose touch with ordinary experiences of reality, partly because one may be reaching for some ideas and ideals for protection from criticism. As I have become clearer about the limits of theory, my writing has improved and I have become less inhibited about writing up my experience. The most important

support for my writing came from an unexpected source and is described in TCC report No 64 'A psycho-analytic perspective on learning through OU videos'.

The idea of a clearer integration of experiences, ideas and their uses internally may also be applied to IET and its difficulties in informing colleagues about its work, although there are many recent improvements in the area of information. I hope that my experiences may help us and others think through the problems of making the use of ideas more effective in institutions.

Keeping a total institution in mind, thinking about needed changes is difficult in a less obvious way, not related to the excessive amount of information available. At every level of organization there will be some resistance to the integration of experiences simply because of bringing together the associated anxieties. Anxieties can only be contained by an 'adequate' level of organization. So we may also reflect on the nature and quality of management and how well it helps, through institutional planning, the development of an individual's work - through challenges, support and rewards.

Notes and the notable

I have notes for about half of the fifty workshops and seminars and I have drawn upon many of these below where they seem to be of particular significance i.e. clear ideas or revealing difficulties about communication. I do not have notes for many seminars because I was talking about something familiar mostly from memory. Some seminars were turned into internal papers.

The more significant activities were often requested by someone with an identifiable role in the institutional structure i.e. organizing a series of activities to which I contributed, the leader of some group or someone who was part of the management structure. These more 'formal' origins of activity are an important way that an institution encourages staff to bring work to a conclusion, especially in a professional situation where individuals negotiate much of their own work. Many of my workshops and seminars originated more spontaneously in situations where I saw an opportunity to say something about my work in progress or finished which was important to me and I thought relevant to others.

Three linked workshops

I will begin my story in January 1982, a particularly significant date for two reasons. I had completed my first process consultancy with a course team (described in TCC report No 65 'Development of a course team') and had a clear idea about what I wanted to say about participant observation. About the same time I was asked by a colleague, Liz Taylor, to contribute to an on-going 'Qualitative research workshop' which had an unusually large membership of over forty staff. I presented three workshops on 'the use of participant observation as a research tool' between March and May.

One of the problems in talking about participant observation is bringing it alive for those who have not shared the experience. To solve this problem, the director of IET, David Hawkrige, agreed to let us base the first workshop on our observations of an IET Board meeting which we could all share. I was a little apprehensive about making this suggestion, given my earlier association with a controversial report (discussed in TCC report No 66 'Reflections on the Tavistock report thirteen years on'). I asked the workshop participants to write up some notes about the Board meeting (a specific part of it) as soon as possible after it. Five days after the workshop I sent a brief summary of it to the participants and quote from it here - "the observers struggled to see what the patterns of interaction were and how they developed and changed. One observer focused particularly on her feelings during the observation. We found that through combining all these perspectives and approaches we appreciated much more the complexity of behaviour in groups and how much is not easily observed or understood. There were two main problems encountered. One was concern about how one's own preconceptions and emotions not only influence what we look for but, more worrying, what we actually are able to see or hear. Secondly is the question, what model might one use to help see and remember? One person criticised the 'openness' of the observation because, to qualify as research, one must use some instrument for validity and reliability. Another said this would introduce a distortion of reality and would result in missing some of the observations we discovered as a group. In one particular interaction in the Board meeting, the combination of unclarity, emotionality and familiar political stances resulted in many of the observers 'switching off'. As a result they found that their notes were inadequate or they could not recall the events. Such loss of contact or involvement, if experienced repeatedly, can have negative implications for one's ability to work. Acknowledging the difficulties in a group

may be supportive for individuals who feel isolated and sensitize a group about its collective effects on each other. Often a particular interaction in a group is more affected by events which have already occurred, by the values attached to future events or by unconscious aspects of relationships which influence behaviour i.e. feelings of superiority, persecution, inadequacy or denial of reality.

I summarized what we learned in a covering memo to the above report - 1. accurate observation is dependent on being in touch with all aspects of one's self 2. personal observations are an important filter which help locate where the important events are 3. the power of observation may be multiplied by the number of individual views shared 4. resistance to knowing is more a disabling defense than a protective one 5. observing at a distance in an uninvolved way may be seen as an expression ('acting-out') of the lack of trust in a group.

In the second workshop I gave the participants notes from the second meeting of a course team I was working with. These notes are included in TCC report No 65 'Development of a course team'. I asked to what extent could we reconstruct the experiences of the team just from the notes and to extend observation of 'what' happened to 'why' and 'how'. I was surprised at the large number of ideas about the team meeting and I listed them in a summary of the workshop - 1. the beginning of the course team meeting seems disorganized and uncomfortable 2. there is a lot of concern about 'lateness' of authors or them going away 3. team members appear to lie about their opinions in the meeting and then express quite opposite opinions outside 4. sometimes the team appears to protect individuals against excessive criticism but under the politeness they are quite rude 5. they do not follow anything through because they are open to too many problems and cannot decide which one to deal with. Is this a failure of leadership or a reflection of other problems in the group? 6. the boundary between the BBC producers and the team is fuzzy 7. everyone seems unhappy, the discussion repetitious and fixed in a form of resistance or defense which does not lead anywhere 8. sometime people need to be ruder to get results 9. the bitter comment of the staff tutor reflects a rather destructive atmosphere 10. the producer appeared to be 'shut up' by one academic's comment.

After the workshop I thought some of these comments might be relevant to understanding other groups but I am not aware of other links having been made. However, I was surprised to see how alive a written observation could be for a

group and how many insights they might possibly bring, with adequate support, to bear on their own working situations.

I had also given the workshop members an outline to help discuss what we thought was going on in the team. Although useful in the workshop, it is now just one more example of an idea which was not made more widely available at the time. I include it below -

1. Management by the chairman: a. clear structure set for meeting which informs progress of work - decisions, compromises, beginnings and endings
b. adaptability and consistency in following structure c. development - assigns new tasks, adopts new procedures, efficiency - balancing authority and empathy.
2. Group support of management: a. members support focusing on task in agenda and following agenda b. modification of authority by appropriate flexibility and use, but not excessive dependence on authority c. development
3. Communication in group: a. group valuing and encouragement of participation (constructive disagreement, avoiding personally destructive comments, noting of contributions and absences) b. empathy, relating concerns which are implicit as well as explicit in the group c. linking and development of discourse
4. Areas of concern - a. individual commitment b. scheduling c. scholarship/teaching d. relations with outside group

The third workshop was also based on the observation of an IET Board but this time I was the only one to bring any notes. Some of the comments in the workshop are summarized here - Eileen was concerned about the effects on an observer on those in the Board meetings being able to participate. Others were not clear about what I wanted from them, concern about the 'target audience' (Board members), concern about their ability to deliver, concern about an unfamiliar area in human relations. They felt that anger in the Board meeting was expressed by the confusion about a vote and fragmented thoughts which were not connected or developed.

It is interesting to see the change between the first and third workshop, particularly the concern about using colleague's experiences as a source of data for staff development. I think their own identification with such anxieties show why it is difficult to continue such research and training within an institution. Staff may have to go outside the institution to pursue such training unless they are part of a group clearly committed to an enquiry into group process. Groups probably have to feel that they are in sufficient difficulty to acknowledge the need for and be able to request support in human relations.

Reviewing process consultancy and links with others

Four months later (September, 1982) I gave a seminar as part of a two day programme organized by the Institutional Research Committee. In the seminar and literature I provided, I summarized IET activities in research and development as the 'Group processes action research project' and linked it with related interests of eleven staff outside IET.

In October I reviewed 'group processes action research' in an IET seminar. My aim was 'to relate experiences of my colleagues to my own so I can come to some conclusions about the institution'. I made a time chart of my activities from 1974 to 1982 to help clarify what direction I was heading. I felt in need of a stronger support group in the OU but was only to find it in the Tavistock 'Consulting to institutions workshop'. 1983 was a busy year for my process consultancy activities in the OU. I gave only one seminar and made my first presentation at the Tavistock workshop, where I outlined the OU's organizational structure and related it to my first consultancy in summer schools (summarized in TCC report No 68 'A consultancy in summer schools'.

First course team simulation workshop

In March 1984 I ran my first simulation workshop, again drawing upon notes from the second course team meeting which I had used in the second (1982) IET workshop discussed above. I attempted to replicate the dynamics of the team meeting by assigning roles to the workshop participants, allowing some time for them to play them and then shared my detailed notes from the second course team meeting. The notes were too detailed, given the time available, although the workshop participants found it interesting and useful. Angie Ballard, one of the participants wrote - "I found this useful, an interesting and stimulating

exercise and look forward to the next session. On reflection I realized two things added to my anxieties - (i) some idea of who the people were, this may be totally erroneous but past experiences falsely coloured my views (ii) feed-back on the role playing, is 'no feed-back' a criticism or neutral and are there similar concerns of authors about drafts?"

Two years later (1986) I gave a seminar at the London Business School, part of my efforts to broaden contacts, and repeated it in IET. In these seminars I took examples from three consultancies - a course team, a course team chairman and summer schools (considered further in TCC report No 67 'Summer schools: individual and institutional learning'. I related events to four levels of development which I derived from psychoanalytic theory and described as follows - a. worry that we will not be supported in our task by others 'outside' (the individual, team, institution) b. worry that I am not capable, that my own resources are lacking c. anxiety that what I need is available somewhere and is not just absent and suspicion that someone else may be getting what I need (i.e. an Oedipal, three way situation) d. more realistic view of above anxieties, containing them through the formation of more integrative symbols, reparative feelings. It was difficult to develop a clear story line using theory in such an inflexible way. My excessive application of theory reflects, in retrospect, the anxieties one can feel addressing an academic audience.

Four months later (July, 1986), I gave a seminar on psychodynamic theory based on my observations of students and staff in a summer school for the OU reading diploma. I was able to take more time to clarify the theory and then link it to experiences everyone had shared in the summer school. It is clear to me now, six years later, that I was having difficulty describing psychodynamic theory clearly enough in seminars. In contrast, I felt much more competent in a process consultancy role which is partly informed by theory and method but also draws upon an understanding unconscious process i.e. as they relate to clarification of boundaries, containment of anxiety and development in the 'here-and-now'.

Three workshops on team work

Two years later (1988) I ran a series of three workshops on team work which were very important to me. They were sponsored by the Personnel Department and reflected the greater level of support for my work in IET. I also used the 'group dynamics' part of the workshop to demonstrate how much relevant expertise is

available in the OU. Four colleagues helped run the small groups and three more were supportive in other ways. I include excerpts from a report I wrote on the workshops below.

"Thirty Open University staff attended one or more of three workshops on team-work - for a possible total of nine hours. My task for the three workshops was to look at the experiences of team integration and reflect on why some staff may feel less well integrated at an institution level e.g. different jobs in different divisions in the university. Although the majority of participants were academics based in the centre, there was a good representation of administrators, clerks and staff from the regions. As we worked in pairs, in threes, in small groups and a large group we had a unique opportunity to hear about the work of colleagues who rarely, if ever, meet. The experience of separation may feel especially strong in a distance teaching institution. One outcome from the workshops was to see how much more important individual differences are compared to any similarities between individuals in a team."

In preparation for the workshop I contacted staff responsible for coordinating training in each of the twenty major OU divisions. After the first two workshops I provided a summary of them to everyone who attended at least one, distributed an annotated reading list and arranged for the readings to be available on a special reserve shelf in the library (first time this has been done), provided optional follow-up activities in the subsequent week and arranged for a subsequent workshop to follow three months later. Although such activities may seem obvious, as well as ensuring success, the evidence of careful planning may have encouraged staff to participate in the rather experimental workshop. Luckily, we had just enough participants to run the third and most risky workshop on group dynamics. The first two were on 'assessing team-work' and 'team building'.

Assessing team work

In the first workshop we used a check-list to help focus on different levels of relationships i.e. intra-psychic, interpersonal, inter-group and institution. First we interviewed each other in pairs using a check-list which had been tested out with other groups. Then in groups of three, one took the role of a boss interviewing a worker and the third took the role of an observer who was to report back to the whole group. We began to see the effects of introducing an

unequal relationship, (boss and worker) and a more distant observer. There is also a risk in using what appears to be an innocuous check-list which may encourage more personal disclosures than one might intend. One participant referred to the check-list as "sneaky". The anxiety this may have created may have contributed to a large drop in numbers in the second workshop. People said through their actions- "I will separate myself from this experience" But they were not entirely cut off because of the summary they received. .

Team building

In the second workshop we changed the focus from that of 'individuals bringing in their experiences from outside the workshop for discussion' to 'creating an experience all those present could share'. We did this through a twenty minute role play in which seven members formed a task group to 'eliminate paperwork'. Roles were assigned - an 'expert' who knew everything provided a contrast to the lack of knowledge felt by others (and represented by a lack of "briefing" papers), a 'peace-maker' who attempted to get everyone to agree, what ever the difference or cost (including avoidance of contact) and the 'impatient' one who would not tolerate disagreement. The discussion of the role play went on so long that there was little time for the final exercise - reading a brief case study of students and staff in summer schools and trying to relate their difficulties those those about learning in teams.

Group dynamics

The third workshop was the most experimental, using 'facilitation' in contrast to the 'teaching' style of the first two. This workshop was organized in two parts. First, participants attended a small group of just five plus two facilitators. The following day participants all came together in a large group which had just one consultant who would help them "to use the experiences in the group in understanding relationships within and between teams at work. Since all colleagues will bring prior experiences with them, the role of the small group facilitators will be to draw attention to the more hidden, less obvious influences on our expectations as they are revealed, indirectly, by whatever comes up in the group." The task for the small group and the large group was the same.

Although the task was educational, I believe facilitators need some background in counselling or therapy in order to maintain the boundary between therapy

and education. This ability requires some theoretical model to draw upon as well as some practical skills. I was personally surprised by the experience of the large group which one participant characterized as 'like a Quaker meeting'. Any frustration and anger participants may have felt had evidently been dealt with in the small groups and the large group provided an ending which felt integrated and complete. We had briefly considered in the second workshop a theory which helped make sense of experiences in groups and this was extended by the annotated reading list I had prepared and had previously shared with my co-facilitators. A final and important part of the organization was talking with a consultant to the staff group who helped debrief us after the final large group.

The workshops involved staff from many different levels and divisions (14 out of 20 divisions) in the OU in discussion of their work in teams and considering how team development may be facilitated. Administrators and clerks tended to be find the workshops more difficult than academic staff, possibly because of academics' experiences in course team. Although secretaries were also invited, none attended.

In 1989 I reviewed the development of process consultancy in the Tavistock workshop and this discussion is summarized in TCC report No 60 'The Tavistock observation course: implications for distance education'.

Two more simulations

In 1990 I ran two more course team simulations, the first as part of the International Distance Teaching Course and the second, for new OU staff, was part of a three day course - 'Introduction to OU distance learning methods' - organized through IET's new PDET programme (Professional Development in Educational Technology) - part of the new IET initiatives to improve and coordinate information and training.

For the International course I worked with two colleagues, Bob Zimmer and Gill Kirkup, who also reviewed what they observed about the simulation. Seven students in the International course participated and only one, Helen, had English as her first language. This, plus the fact that she also worked in the OU was to have a significant effect in the dynamics which developed. The task was to 'form a team to plan an evaluation of this course and conduct the evaluations'. I gave them an outline to help them get started - 1. How to do it, some issues: a.

assign roles in the team b. decide activities c. agree timing 2. Conduct the evaluation 3. Discuss your experiences, some issues: working in a team, team development, being a chair-person or member. The aim of the simulation was 'to enable participants to work more effectively in team meetings.'

I wrote up a summary of the simulation and quote here from that report - "According to some, the disagreement that developed at the beginning is typical among academics. Some disagreed that there had been conflict, that they had been happy to hear each other. There were strong feelings about the idea of 'majority rule' because it would suppress individuality and creativity. Although the simulation was seen as a game, it was a serious game. Part way into the simulation Helen became a strong focus with participants speaking almost entirely to her. She appeared to represent anxieties about 'inside/outside' issues because she was the only British person there. Because of the difficulty a team has in accepting its own authority, through lack of experience of each other in the task and worries about outside problems (resources and criticism), then one person may be 'appointed' (unconsciously) by the team as the 'authority' to make the situation safer. Helen is also an ambiguous figure because IET gave her the task of evaluating the course because of her prior association with IET. The two roles of participant and evaluator are contradictory, confusing, worrying and exhausting. So Helen became a focus of anxiety and was encouraged to experience and express all the group's feelings - something which became very painful for her. Because authority figures are the subject of ambivalent feelings, they will idealized at times and given too much power. At other times they will be denigrated in various ways e.g. ignoring their attempts to manage. By 'acting out' anxieties (rather than thinking about them) boundaries of the team become better defined and 'real' through the shared experiences. The ability to experience and express emotion is a strength far greater than intellectual ability alone."

"Through the team simulation you (the participants) became more integrated internally as separate individuals as you became more involved with each other and took responsibility for different tasks. Defending your roles against my comments was evidence of your developing a clearer identity as a team. Your integration with groups outside is more difficult because of your different countries as well as your different interests and training. At first you had difficulty hearing each other or allowing sufficient time to plan an evaluation strategy in light of the real limits for conducting an evaluation. These kinds of experiences are common in teams. Loss of ability and problems accepting

authority inclines a team towards avoiding any confrontation of the problems which interfere with work. Sometimes a scapegoat will take away negative feelings which then enables the team to continue work, albeit at the sacrifice of an individual. Institutions should be responsible, not only for training, but also for enabling discussion about the dynamic processes experienced in teams, at the time they are being experienced - both the destructive and creative aspects."

The course team simulation for new OU staff had seven participants from four different 'Faculties'. They were given a list of tasks to begin - 1. Beginning: a. to decide who will be the chairman b. to volunteer for the remaining roles (course manager, staff tutor, authors - please try to play the on the bases of what you have experienced, heard or imagined) 2. Simulation proper: a. agree an agenda to (i) discuss 18 pages from the Policy Book (by Barbara Hodgson) (ii) to summarize what is needed to improve the book (iii) to negotiate with the author (Barbara) about what changes can be agreed and when the next draft will be available.

In a separate note to three participants I suggested that they take particular roles - an author to be "very resistant to some of the suggestions", Barbara "to be reluctant to agree a date for the next draft" and the staff tutor to "attempt to reduce any conflict or disagreement which threatens to develop by a variety of strategies" (collusion, avoidance, denial). In my work with teams I had seen such roles seriously disrupt work. Within a half hour the discussion had become very heated and began to veer away from specific recommendation into ideologies about learning. Within ten minutes Barbara had become rather uncomfortable with the conflicting comments e.g. "fundamental changes are needed, throw out the past efforts", "it is not necessary to recast the text". They were unable to get beyond discussion of the Book and I ended the simulation to allow time to cool off and reflect on our experience. This is a summary of their comments -

one needs to be tactful as well as forthright and at times reassuring. It will not hurt if one admits to making the same mistakes as an author. One picks up 'huge vibes' in a team which one needs to be careful about. The chair attempted to keep us civilized. The author was left with the feeling of having a lot to do because of the lack of very specific comments. One should sort out their personal problems outside of meetings. Perhaps alternative strategies ought to be tried ('brain-storming, assigning a counsellor role).

At the end we were surprised at the level of emotion a simulation can stir up and perhaps more respectful for and cautious about what can happen in team meetings.

My last presentation in the Tavistock workshop is summarized in TCC report No 61 'Process consultancy within the Open University 1981 - 1991'. The last seminar mentioned here is described in detail in TCC report No 62 'Understanding course teams: organization and dynamics'.

Conclusion

All these activities are related to an interest in aspects of learning not often considered in sufficient depth or detail - difficulties in learning, anxieties about learning and defenses against anxieties which inhibit learning and yet are part of learning. Acquiring a theory and skills to help understand unconscious aspects of learning and development in teams, as well as in individuals, may take many years. If my own learning in this area has taken thirteen years, what time scale might we have to consider for an institution to implement policy and procedures to support group learning - within and between teams?

List of related TCC reports

- 59 The demand for consultancy on group processes in the OU
- 60 The Tavistock observation course: implications for distance education
- 61 Process consultancy within the OU 1981-1991
- 62 Understanding courses teams: organization and dynamics
- 63 Workshops and seminars on team work: 1978-1991
- 64 A psycho-analytic perspective on learning through OU videos
- 65 Development of a course team
- 66 Reflections on the Tavistock report thirteen years on
- 67 Summer schools: individual and institutional learning
- 68 A consultancy in summer schools
- 69 Group relations training and consultancy
- 75 The Tavistock Institute of Human Relations consultancy in the Open University
- 76 Open University staff reactions to the Tavistock report

Appendix A. List of workshops and seminars

1978

Seminar - 'Progress of the the Tavistock consultancy', IET. November

1979

Seminar - 'The behaviour of groups in organizations', OU London Regional Office. September.

1980

Seminar - 'The dynamics of course teams', IET (Sixth in the series of 'small group work discussions'). February

1982

Workshop 1 - 'Observation as a qualitative research tool', IET Qualitative Methods Group (QMG) Based on observation of the IET Board meeting of 1.3.82. 3 March.

Workshop 2 - 'Observation of course teams'. QMG. 17 March

Workshop 3 - 'Observation: a research tool and insight for group work'. Based on observation of an IET Board meeting QMG. 20 May

Seminar - 'Boundaries and course teams', IET. April

Seminar - 'The geology course team and relations with the BBC', OU Earth Sciences Department, Faculty of Science. May

Seminar - 'Course teams and the BBC: psychodynamics of groups at work', OU Institutional Research Committee. 25 September

Seminar - 'Review of group process action research', IET. October

1983

Seminar - 'Institutional influences on groups', IET. February

Workshop - 'Consultancy in summer schools', *Tavistock Clinic, Consulting to Institutions Workshop*. November

1984

Seminar - 'Development of a course team', IET. January

Seminar - 'Working in groups in summer schools', IET. January

Workshop - 'Course team simulation exercise', IET. 26 March

Seminar - 'Integration of a working group and the task', IET. March

Seminar - 'Managing the irrational', OU Course Resources Committee, Low cost production workshop. April

1985

Seminar - 'Individual and institutional learning', IET. May

Seminar - 'Summer schools research', IET. September

1986

Seminar - 'Experience of working in groups', IET/CIP (Course Innovations Programme. January

Seminar - 'Individual and institutional learning', *London Business School*. 5 March. Repeated in IET, March

Workshop - 'Course team simulation exercise', IET. April

Seminar - 'Dynamics of learning and development', OU summer school for P334 Reading and Individual Development. July

1987

Seminar - 'Innovations in the OU: information technology' IET/CIP, January

Seminar - 'Human awareness and practical skills', IET. December

1988

Workshop - 'Assessing team work', IET Open learning workshop no. 4. May

Seminar - 'Human relations education' IET Teaching and Consultancy Centre (TCC). June

Workshop 1 - 'Assessing team work', (Part of OU staff training programme offered by the Staff Services Department). October

Workshop 2 - 'Team development' (OU, as above) November

Workshop 3 - 'Group dynamics' (OU, as above) December

1989

Seminar - 'Experiential learning', IET and the OU Advanced Standing Committee. April

Workshop - 'Consultancy in the OU', *Tavistock Clinic, Consulting to Institutions workshop*. 27 June

Seminar - 'Consulting on group processes in the OU: a history', IET/TCC. September

Seminar - 'Group dynamics in distance education', IET International Distance Teaching Course. September

1990

Workshop - 'Team work and training', Inland Revenue Training Team, Ravenscar. 29-30 March

Workshop - 'Consultancy in distance education', *Tavistock Clinic, Consulting to institutions workshop*. 22 May

Workshop - 'Course team simulation', IET International Distance Teaching Course. 24 July

Workshop - 'Course for new lecturers', University of London Institute of Education. 10-15 September

Workshop - 'Team work training', Inland Revenue Training Team, London. 21 September

Workshop - 'Team work training', Inland Revenue Training Team, London 16 November

Workshop - 'Course team simulation', IET (for staff from School of Education, Social Sciences, Centre for Science Education). 11 October

1991

Workshop - 'Civil service consultancy', Tavistock Clinic, Consulting to institutions workshop. 15 January

Seminar - 'Team processes - how to do it', IET Course Design Research Group. February

Seminar - 'Consultancy and creativity', OU residential school for B882 Creative Management course. April

Seminar - 'Social dreaming', OU residential school for B882 Creative Management course. April

Seminar - 'Dynamic theory', CoSy (Computer Conference System) Conference. 23 April - 3 May

Workshop - 'Course for new lecturers', University of London, Institute of Education. 9 - 13 September

Workshop - 'Changing role: from consultancy to course team author', Tavistock Clinic, Consulting to institutions workshop. 8 October

Workshop - 'Course team dynamics', OU Centre for Modern Languages. 23 October

Seminar - 'Teaching about group dynamics through OU videos', Contribution to Joint TCC/PDET (Professional Development in Educational Technology) Conference. 2 December

Appendix B Some internal papers and their focus

1978

Groups dynamics in course teams - importance of a group relations approach, February

1979

Some staff responses to the Tavistock Report - summary of twenty six interviews by IET 'Steering Group', December

1980

Social processes in creativity - discussion of Tavistock ideas

1982

Meaning studies group - using experiences from an on-going seminar group to describe differences between 'knowing about' and 'having and experience of' (containing) May

Consultation to a course team about group processes; psychodynamics essential to and destructive of work - summary of course team consultancy, June

Group processes action research - summary of related activities by staff in separate department of the OU, September

Observations on the science faculty conference - integration of working groups with reference of large group behaviour, November

1984

Report on an investigative project with summer school staff - summary of two weeks with seven courses in 1983 and recommendations, January

Consultation from within an institution - contrasting differences between helping and consultancy in modifying anxieties in teams, groups and institution the importance of support groups in learning from regressive experiences.

1985

The hidden side of OU summer school - summary of enquiry with Senior Counsellor Research and Development group

Increasing productivity of groups through understanding - avoiding anxieties and the cost to effective management, introduction to group relations literature, December

1986

Multi-disciplinary teams and institutions - comparison of course teams, summer schools and BBC and how dynamics of groups lead to learning and development, January

Some possible consequences of student study at home for OU staff in regional offices - impact of separation on students and effects on staff, February

Supporting briefing and training by using examples from learning and development by students and staff - relating enquires into group processes to an RAS report, March

The Peter Pan principle in planning - avoidance of anxiety and lack of group relations literature in OU courses, May

A note on the difficulty of enquiry into anxieties associated with learning and development - analysis of why the RAS seminar on 'The emotional experience of summer schools' was cancelled, June

1987

Some thoughts related to computer conferencing - exploring the dynamics of groups at a distance, January

Electronic publishing and secretarial staff - problems provoked by change, February

Personal experiences of innovation - summary of interviews with seventy staff, June

What is the source of authority for and justification of my enquiry into innovative developments? - linking my work to IET aims, September

How committed is management to staff development? - importance of human relations skills in training, September

Looking forward to working with 1990 courses - anticipating the problems teams may encounter, September

A central area of work: where will it be based? - recommend fortnightly two hour workshops in the three IET Centres to discuss progress of work, September

IET consultancy and contracting - importance of contracting in consultancy, regression at different levels of organization, October

1988

Some questions arising from two staff training and appraisal papers - contribution to policy for staff training, classifying five areas of training; research, teaching, managing the system, managing roles, team and institutional development, January

A theory for team work - two ideas in management; authority and containment, February

Proposal for change in working environments - how to bring together staff experiences of working in teams, recommendation for weekly 1 & 1/4 hour meetings, March

Loss of the capacity to think: impact of information technology on an institution - accounting for two resignations of department heads

1990

Searching for a group relations approach in OU courses; Management, HSW and Social Sciences - examples of how course materials could be improved by applying a psychodynamic theory, January

Impact of management culture on courses - examples of regressive defenses, November

Psychodynamic theory of thinking; movements away from dynamic tensions - outline to compare the literature which represents conflict theory and its avoidance, November

1991

Proposal for a diploma in consultancy skills - description of three courses and reading list, May

Development of a course team

by Robert Nicodemus

1992

Institute of Educational Technology
The Open University, Milton Keynes MK7 6AA



The Teaching and Consultancy Centre is part of the Open University's Institute of Educational Technology.

Its aims are:

1. **To help improve student learning in the University by advising and assisting Faculties, Schools, Continuing Education, University Committees and groups, as appropriate. A chief concern is the accessibility and teaching effectiveness of course materials, to which the Centre contributes through its work on course teams: through research; course planning, policy making and working methods; critical reading of draft materials, and the evaluation of courses.**
2. **To maintain a knowledge base for the above activities by helping to research problems in the OU learning system and by recording experience in course teams and on committees, and also to encourage innovatory solutions and practices.**
3. **To provide consultancy and training, inside the OU and on a contract basis with outside organisations, based on the staff's wide experience in distance education and open learning. On this same basis, to chair course teams and write course materials, and to 'transform' materials produced by external contributors into high quality distance teaching material.**

FOREWORD

This is the first and only study of the dynamics in an OU course team, how dynamics contribute to the development of a team and the progress of work.

DEVELOPMENT OF A COURSE TEAM

Introduction

This is a story about the emotional life of an OU course team and how it developed through twenty meetings over two years. To tell this story I took on a role of facilitating the team during their meetings, making comments when I thought another perspective might be useful. I attempted to relate the subject of conflicts to the wider context of a distance education environment and associated anxieties which exaggerate differences which in other situations could be reasonably held. We were all concerned to come up with a description of course team development easily shared with others and facilitating their team work through a better understanding of the function of emotions.

The many details of meetings can obscure a simple story line and distract the attention of an observer trying to understand experiences which may have hidden origins. I wrote up notes immediately after meetings and focused mainly on things people said and did to each other that seemed significant at the time. Memory served as a filter against details which were less interesting, in a psychodynamic sense. On one occasion the emotional content of a meeting was so strong that I was unable to remember the details afterwards. I probably would have been able to remember had I been clearer at the time about the theory I was drawing on to help make sense of it all.

One of the first tasks which a new team addresses, unconsciously, is to get a clearer idea about itself. It starts out as a collection of individuals who have only made an intellectual commitment to the idea of a new course and its content. The emotional commitment is expressed through trust and this can only develop over time through shared experiences. Early on the team develops a better idea of where it is in time and space by reflecting on what has gone on before. Some team members appear to resist who or what is included in the team or course, as part of the development of trust. Because this particular course was replacing one which was successful there were worries about the new one being as good or, hopefully better. This worry led the chairman of the new team, joined by the chairman of the old team, to ask me if there might be some help with relationships in the team. Their experiences in the old team had been difficult and they did not want the quality of the new course adversely affected by problems which seemed unresolved and unresolvable.

'Minutes' of course team meetings provide an official record of decisions as well as opinions which might be important to future decisions about policy or course content. The minutes of the course team were seventy-five pages in length. My notes were only twenty-five pages long and rarely repeated anything in the minutes, so different are the records of the intellectual and emotional life of a team. I shared my notes with the team to correct any errors of fact. There were none and only one sentence uttered by a staff tutor was removed at his request. I have put my 'transcript' of the meetings in the Appendix, again to avoid swamping the reader with too much detail as I attempt to tell the story of the emotional life of this team. There were eighteen members of the team plus myself.

There are more details about OU course teams in TCC report No. 62 'Understanding course teams: organization and development'. A half credit course usually has sixteen correspondence texts which students are expected to spend about 12 hours on. In the course we are considering here the texts were organized into six blocks.

Team development

The twenty team meetings may be placed in three time categories - beginning, middle and end. In the beginning period of nine months (January - September) the first drafts of most correspondence texts were discussed over six meetings. In the middle period of five months (October - February) the second drafts of most correspondence texts were discussed over seven meetings. In the end period of twelve months (April - March) the third drafts of texts were discussed within the first seven months, by October, over four meetings. In the remaining three meetings spread out over five months (November - March) final business was concluded and the job of maintaining course presentation left to the course manager and chair of the 'presentation team'.

I did not begin to intervene in meetings until the middle period although I talked with all but two members separately and met with the chairman after every meeting. The middle period was very difficult, partly because most changes are made to the second drafts and, against the pressure of changes and time schedules, more conflicts emerged. In this team there was a history of difficult relations between BCC producers and academics which were exacerbated by the

involvement of American co-producers. They seemed to represent, unconsciously, anxieties associated with 'outside' the team i.e. what criticisms peers would make and what others would do with their materials. Although all teams have these worries, the difficulties which focused on the BBC producers are unusual but not unique to this team.

From a psychodynamic perspective, a team defines its boundaries through emotional experiences between individuals or subgroups. The boundaries give a sense of place and change, or questions about space and time generally. For this course team the prior existence of a successful course provoked anxiety as well as assurance that they knew how to do it. Precedents established in the old course also became a focus of security so that in some early meetings it was difficult for the chairman to get the team away from their memories and into the business of the day. At times the team did not appear to listen to the chairman and he seemed to represent their mixed feelings about the institution i.e. one which makes demands about schedules difficult to meet as well as providing resources needed for success. In reality, the chairman and the course manager operate at the boundary of the team and institution more than others and so become a focus of persecutory anxieties i.e. what others outside might do to them, especially since their work is so public and exposed and the expectations so high. Three of the four staff tutors also became a focus of anxiety, especially in relation to one of the central members of staff who I identify as the 'reader' because of his seniority and experience. These conflicts also helped to focus anxieties about trust.

For an OU course team there are many boundaries to think about which gradually become more inclusive of others as the course nears the time of presentation e.g. the staff in the thirteen regional offices who organize part-time tutors, staff in the examinations office and many other who are essential to the many complex systems within the OU.

So the boundaries between individual, team, institution and society also provide a focus for conflict which help clarify differences that are eventually contained, emotionally and intellectually, in the idea of a course which can be taught at a distance. Although the teacher-student relationship is missing, the role is brought alive through the relationships which are available in the team or sometimes outside the team. Although the task of a team may be clear in terms of intellectual content, it also becomes more real emotionally through relationships which are available in the present. Although the primary task of

the university, to conduct research and teach, is familiar enough, the difficulties of attaining the more idealistic notions associated with social change are 'lived through' by OU staff, especially in course teams and in summer schools. In these places of intense personal relationships we struggle over the paradox of facilitating the fullest development of individuals, not limited by class or economic constraints, as well as integrating this increasing diversity of individuals within a cohesive society.

Members of a team also become more individual as they are given the authority by the team to write their materials, the trust probably evolving with the team's survival of conflict. So separation and differentiation of individual work become integrated in the form of a course which, in turn, becomes part of a complex multi-media distance teaching system. There is a price for integration which, in psychodynamic terms, means coping with persecutory anxieties turned inside i.e. concern about the destructiveness of conflict and a wish to repair what may be damaged, or imagined to be so. The 'reparative' urge is an important source of creativity which is why some consultants who work with organizations view the containment of depressive anxieties as the most formidable challenge to team work and, even more, to the integration of teams within an institution. The inter-group level of relationships is often associated with the greatest anxieties.

The moments of awareness about reparation, with its associated responsibilities, are usually invisible because they are personal and individual and usually unconscious. But in this team there was such a brief moment shared in the fifth meeting when everyone looked at the centre of the table, unable to look directly at each other. Psychodynamic theory is brought alive through the experiences of staff in a course team and made available to us, the observers, to help us better understand our own experience of working in teams.

Beginnings

In meeting 1 members are very aware of the old course and previous difficulties in relationships which they refer to obliquely i.e. authors not taking note of other's comments in writing the next draft, enmity in relationships and the pressures of the 'production machine'. In meeting 2 they discuss the first drafts of block 1 but there is considerable disagreement over what ought to be included, particularly the amount of materials with an historical emphasis written by a staff tutor. The reader is especially critical and the conflict which disrupts this

meeting will continue into others. On one level, this can be seen as personal competition for space in the course for one's own view, especially for people shadowed by doubt about their ability to teach or work in teams. Because the conflict becomes so irrational and persistent we should consider what anxieties are being addressed here i.e. about academic success or student success, about control of one's own work or control by the team or 'production machine' - the latter anxiety experienced by the chairman in terms of doubts about his ability to manage.

In meeting 3 the reader fails to provide his revised draft and the chairman's disappointment about this is rather hidden by his comment lets 'concentrate on the bit of the units available' - at least that was the emotional message that came across to me. Team members are being very cautious about committing themselves to the team. A tutor has not read the drafts. The senior lecturer refuses to comment on the units available because they will be changed so much when the late unit is added. The reader has to go out of the country so cannot say when his unit will be finished. One lecturer's comment about 'production camels' sums up a feeling about being lost in a hot dry desert with nothing to refresh and no one to care. Conflict between the staff tutor and reader continues to disrupt progress. Continual reference to the old course appear to function as a defense against anxieties which also inhibits progress until a lecturer expresses his impatience - 'lets get off the bicycle shed and back to the units'.

In meeting 4 discussion of the reader's late unit is concluded without difficulty although the chairman suggests that work is speeded up. Tension with the BBC producers also appears. In meeting 5, four members arrive late, perhaps anticipating how difficult this meeting will be. Discussion gets stuck in reflections about the old course which helps avoid problems in the present. The chairman's doubts about his ability to manage are greatly increased in this meeting, as we discussed afterwards. Even though he was very competent, it is impossible to anticipate many conflicts or to resolve them because they are addressing anxieties which are largely at an unconscious level and concern events in the future, outside the team. Anxieties about vulnerability are 'acted out' by a second staff tutor who includes in his draft materials from a well know text without acknowledging them i.e. finding a safe authority outside. Difficulties between the academics and a BBC producer continue to develop.

This is also the last meeting before the summer break which may contribute to their difficulties, particularly anxieties about separation, isolation and having to cope on one's own. About mid way through the meeting members began to focus on the centre of the table, evidently unable to look at each other. This behaviour, although it did not go on for very long, was very striking and atypical. I thought afterwards that it may have reflected their concern about the destructive processes in team work. After the meeting the chairman did ask if I could produce a paper on the problems of 'lateness' of authors. In addition to being concerned about members of the course team he may also have wanted to encourage me to make a direct contribution in the meetings, something I did not begin until the 7th meeting. I thought I had missed an opportunity to make an intervention in the 5th meeting when their preoccupation with the old course consumed at least a half hour of their time. In my final written report to them I suggested that a relevant intervention would have been - 'there seems to be a uniformity of opinion here that answers are to be found outside, that there is not much individual hope we can get on with the task ourselves'.

Middle of development

Unfortunately I missed the 6th meeting but from accounts of it, it went well. Meeting 7 begins with a feeling of determination to prevent any further diversions from work. I suggested that a particular comment by the chairman was an attempt at humour which should not be taken as sarcasm. My concern to protect the feelings of a lecturer probably reflected my own ambivalent feelings about my role, concern about destructiveness and possibly adding to it by calling attention to the dynamics. In a process consultancy role, one is attempting to discriminate between inner and outer reality in one's self, in other individuals and in the team - between members and at the boundary of the team with others outside. I was attempting in this situation to think through the meaning of evidence which, initially, was in the form of uncomfortable emotions about myself, as well as others. It is this role, making a safe place for thinking is more important than being right or wrong. Showing that the role of commenting on process can be survived also enables members of a team to acknowledge more of their own experiences and concerns. I actually think my first comment was wrong, that sarcasm was the intent. But my second comment which pointed to concerns about inside/outside issues seemed correct i.e. when a BBC producer arrived late his arrival and comment were not acknowledged. Not only was the team meeting in a new place, a temporary building, the BBC had also moved

into their new building on the campus, after being based in London for many years. Boundary changes may pass without notice, or be denied, when individuals are preoccupied with relationship problems. Now it was the producer's turn to feel outside the team, unrecognized and not cared for like the chairman and staff tutors may have felt earlier. At one level, the academic members of the team were becoming more concerned about their BBC relationship as presentation came closer. At another level, the BBC producer also represented the academic's concerns about the future, especially what the American co-producers might do, although this issue becomes more explicit later.

Discussion of second drafts in meeting 8 went smoothly and at the end they discussed a paper I had written for them and circulated a week earlier. The course minutes summarized their comment and are included in the Appendix.

At the beginning of meeting 9 the reader appears to pair up with the BBC producer, symbolized by a TV script shared just between them. The rest of the team members are irritated that they have not been kept informed. Then a third staff tutor become the focus of anxiety by the 'invisibility' of her concerns to the rest of the team. I point this out but am ignored, as are the questions of the second BBC producer. After 45 minutes I point out that they are avoiding some worries which have to be solved before decisions can be made. After an initial objection they do address the problems and the tensions which seem to be about trust are lowered.

Meeting 10 goes smoothly, possibly helped by my interventions. In meeting 11 a lecturer who is late with his second draft (it should have been discussed in the previous meeting) becomes the focus of conflict. I make my longest interventions here, commenting on their apparent inability to say what the lecturer has achieved in preference to criticising him, on the lack of commitment represented by members who have not read the drafts and linking it to feelings about the BBC being on the 'outside' and not heard. One producer evidently felt rather uncomfortable being 'seen' by me. I think that the greater number of my interventions here reflect two things, first is that the team feels much more robust now than it did earlier. Second, I suspect that the lack of a place for me to discuss and review my own experiences may have left me with feeling of emotional indigestion. I was able to get rid of some of my feelings because the team boundaries seemed much firmer. In retrospect, I also think my role of

facilitation was finished now that they had discussed half of the second drafts. In fact, this was nearly my last intervention.

In meeting 12 the issue about who controls selection of TV presenters came to a head in a very uncomfortable meeting which I found difficult to remember later. These were old problems concerned with the autonomy of the BBC which had little to do with the development of the team and would erupt again nine months later in meeting 17. The details included in the Appendix should serve as a warning about how destructive unresolved problems can become in a team, whoever is involved.

Endings

In the eight meetings of the final year, when mostly third drafts were discussed, moments of potential conflict were quickly contained and not allowed to disrupt work, with the exception of meeting 17.

I did not make any further interventions in team meetings but after meeting 16 I gave a talk to the entire department which the team was part of. I include here what the course manager wrote in the course minutes about my talk -

"Robert Nicodemus talked about the work he had been doing looking at the understanding of groups. He outlined his background as a part-time associate at the Tavistock Clinic and explained how he became involved with the course team. He emphasized that this had been a collaborative venture which he felt had broader implications for the University. He commented on how the course team had evolved as a group over the past eighteen months and how he had tried to help. He said he thought that the team was working and the group was now much more cohesive. Robert outlined the general problems experienced by course teams; problems between individuals (e.g. broad criticism and emotionality), individual members problems (e.g. lateness) and difficulties between groups from separate institutions. He then detailed the events and personal encounters which he felt were significant in one particular meeting (number 9). He went on to outline the OU/BBC relationship and contrasted the differences between these two group; identity, aims, work cycles, sense of importance and values. Discussion followed about how well course teams function and about the relationship between the Department and BBC producers. Robert concluded by saying that he felt that perhaps our expectations of course

teams were too high and that things might need to be structured differently, although he added that this had been attempted elsewhere and not been successful"

Team member comments

My talks with individual members revealed their personal feelings about the course team. The third staff tutor (identified as 'c') who left the team said - "course team members have not been properly educated. There is no sense of a two way social process. They only use you. I don't think the chairman is authoritarian enough". The Reader did not want to discuss his experiences and once commented - "I'm no good in groups." Another member said about him - "Why are bad teachers given the lion's share to write? He will only write but not comment on others' writing. He does not participate in the team. He paces around, comes and goes out of the room. We don't appear to be learning from our mistakes. We are too polite but we have to be thick skinned".

Yet another observed - "the experience of creating a unit seems to be that one is taken apart at the course team level, where they cannot discriminate between personality and academic matters. Style is a derivative of both. Then the course is processed through the administrative system with their own criteria". One of the late authors observed - "writing goes so slow. I must be slower than anyone else...It is difficult to keep to the schedule with all the other demands...writing TMAs, examinations, tutor notes. I've done about two weeks research over the past two years. My colleagues in the field think I've disappeared...All these demands tend to paralyse me. I do nothing. We agree to schedules we know we cannot stick to and the deadlines seem artificial".

One staff tutor, who did not appear to experience any difficulties in the team, said - "I'm not used to groups like this. My former experience is of more authoritarian groups who work more on compromise, not readily saying what you feel, although a few indulge themselves, some in an immature way sometimes leading to angry exchanges or, in an extreme, not talking or even staying in the same room. I'd like to know how others perceive me. I'd be able to relax...The course team seems to work well. I've worked with all of them before. Perhaps it is more difficult getting down to work because they have to get out of their other group belongings. Some of them would like to take over. Others are thought of as a joke or incredibly insensitive to their effect on others or are

inconsistent and will do the next day what they complained about one another. They express in public what ought to be private. I had such a hard time a year ago I could hardly bring myself to speak...it is more of a problem for staff tutors in the periphery, getting feedback on how well they are doing their job. I take criticism terribly. I curl up and die. There is little opportunity for personal support."

The two BBC producers also had some observations - "Course team members are in the group for themselves, for their own advancement and not for working together. The meetings are not where the work gets done, it gets done outside, informally, by a small group of dedicated people. They reverse decisions made in the team and everyone else has a feeling of not being relevant, of not being any use...we used to be much more active in course teams...but now have a feeling of tremendous waste of time...Teams are too large for work and ought to be kept down to nine people at most...Compared to the early days there seems to have been a loss of trust between course teams and the BBC. The old problems keep appearing with no sense of improvement." The older producer commented- "Academics don't think we know how to make the best programme. We don't trust them to help us. The relationship has worsened. In the beginning we were looked upon as the experts. They let us get on with it...It hardens into a them and us situation. They say our problems are similar. They have to struggle with less good authors so why shouldn't we struggle with less good TV presenters...Perhaps because our product is more visible we are more vulnerable to attack. If we make a bad programme it will be turned against us both by our own bosses and by the OU. Each side consults their hierarchy who say 'don't let them get away with that'".

Chairman's comments

I wrote six papers for the team during this time in which I summarized my observations. The chairman responded to a number of these. For example- "Thank you for your note following the (second) CT meeting. I found it interesting to 'look in sideways' so to speak, through your eyes...It is difficult to absorb exactly what is going on during the meeting from the chair, especially when it's not what people are saying but the actual manner of saying it that may be the really important thing. I think we often have a speech which, whatever their content...is actually saying 'look at me, I'm here too!', just as the chair may be trying to shut one person up, or get another one speaking, or try to!. I found

your analysis of the non-productive first hour an interesting one: I wonder if we always will be stuck with it."

A year after ending my work with this first course team, the chairman wrote the following- "Your intervention in meeting 11 when (the author who was late) was being torn limb from limb is a specific example of your kind of contribution that no one else would have made, dealing with the conscious business and the unconscious business to give him a hard time because he was late. Also your articulation of (the Reader's) problem was helpful to people frustrated by his behaviour and unable to do anything about it. You bring it out into the open, the frustrations we and the editors had in handling him because he was late...A more diffuse effect is on people beginning to look at the team process in ways you were - it offers a different interpretation to an everyday approach. You had quite a lot of initial points wrong about the staff tutor/academic issue because there was a hidden agenda which you could not know about. But components of your inside/outside analysis were right and useful to look at. You could have been more useful perhaps doing more of that...as an observer of process, but there is a problem of you getting more involved which would distract from your impartiality. Someone like you without a role in content...you would have been the man that both sides tried to convince....You can begin to form tentative deductions to point forward what then to do...BBC producers take away frustrations. They make a start, reporting, and are surprised at the can of worms it opens about things that they think just concern them. If we can become aware of what is business, the every day administrative items, we could perhaps allow a more leisurely intellectual wide ranging and less structured discussion of academic issues. It was useful for you to point out that academics are afraid to deliver a product subject to criticism. They would rather keep hidden that which is not perfect...it is an understandable reaction to our way of working. It is useful to open what is a powerful thing..."

A description of team development

Combining ideas from psychodynamic theory with the experiences from this one team provides a view about team development which may be broadly applicable to teams in any institution. The idea of a team evolves through sharing three kinds of experiences - emotional, rational and spiritual. A team is a physical thing located within an environment with different levels of organization. A team is an idea pushed forward by ideals as well as fears about what may or may

not happen as a result of wanting to or having to take on different roles. A team spirit will alternate between hope and despair as the unknown becomes known and the unknowable a certain reality. As a team develops so will trust and a willingness to test out what is real and what is imagined. The strength of enquiry will only be limited by the member's capacity to contain the anxieties which accompany learning. The environment provided by the institution may encourage learning from experience or collude in the lies that lead to regressive behaviour - hope is lost through collusion, thoughts are acted out, boundaries and differences confused to a point of chaos.

In the beginning is chaos, an association of individuals who only have an idea about a shared task but no shared experiences of roles they must take to complete the task. They have an abundance of anxieties, however, about commitment and trust - of others abilities and capabilities for tolerance and patience. Willingness to use the inevitable difficulties as opportunities for learning rather than for judgements about inferiority can only be tested out through shared experience. In the face of chaos, anxieties may be tempered by creating ideals which one may strive for or be avoided by absolute dependency.

As work begins, structures begin to form as differences emerge between individuals within the team and between the team and groups outside - differences in roles and tasks. The more difficult it is to know what is unknown, as in large complex institutions, the more anxieties there will be about failure, of those inside or caused from outside the team. Anxieties are expressed through relationships which also test out the realities of the situation. Issues become polarized and people stereotyped, prepared to fight over boundaries or flee from them because actions take over thinking. A magic world emerges where anything may be instantly reversed through playing on a more solid ground between the boundaries which separate us.

As one become caught up in the processes, there is more awareness of the consequences of behaviour and of our own responsibilities, more than the one's we might wish others to have. If the possibility of something better in the future seems hopeless, anxieties may be avoided by pairing up with someone also lacking any basis of faith and colluding to prevent any change. The alternative is the containment of anxieties through being able to think about them rather than acting on them, as if a thought equals an action.

Conclusion

Although I worked with this team for two years, my role as facilitator was really concluded after one year when the team was half way through discussions of the second drafts of correspondence texts. I was not aware of this at the time. In teams I have worked with subsequently, in the role of facilitator, I have also found that the most important period of their development is concentrated within about 6 to 12 months. Very important to the development of a team may be a commitment to understand the dynamic processes they are working through, possibly drawing upon some views as outlined above. Whether they attempt to do this on their own or bring in a process consultant for some of the time, a focus on 'here-and-now' experiences will be very important to learning about the dynamics within a team, between individuals and sub-groups, and between the team and groups outside. Relationships at the intergroup level will be the most difficult ones to think about. There is rarely anyone who will be attempting to hold some idea of the total institution in mind, including all the anxieties associated with interdependence. The relation of the institution with the environment outside may also be significant in understanding. The team able to see that many of the dynamics originate from within the team is probably well integrated, internally and externally. Otherwise, it could not contain the anxieties associated with learning at an institutional level.

Appendix Notes about course team meetings

Members of the course team.

CTC	course team chairman
CC	course coordinator
Reader	reader
SL	senior lecturer
Lec	lecturer (one of six)
STa	staff tutor
STb	staff tutor
STc	staff tutor
STd	staff tutor
BBC1	producer
BBC2	producer
BBC3	senior producer
Prof	department head
Robert	consultant

1 - (January)

In this review meeting the team discusses organization of the team, course aims and objectives, content outline, T.V. and student background. Some of the comments I wrote down after the meeting follow -

STc: this is the most important course in the department. In the old course there was a problem of a lack of student interest

SL: because production is so spread out we should finish discussing all the first drafts before beginning the second drafts.

Prof: course production is initially O.K. Then a syndrome sets in by the time we get to the second draft. No notice has been taken of what has been said about the first drafts. Is this arrogance or ignorance? The team gets into a habit of ruder comments to try to have some effect. Do we need to step back and be more polite?

STa: because we are correspondence teaching each other, it is important not to leave colleagues in mid air. This leads to a divisive course team and with enmity the whole structure is undermined.

There is some discussion of the cosy start to course production, of early contemplation of aims and objectives, of leisurely early drafts and then the production machine catches up and you have to fit in.

2 - (March)

The chairman anticipates some problems with the early units and suggests they try to reach agreement on the structure and how much each of three authors will write (Reader, SL, STc). The chairman finds it quite difficult to keep them focused on this task, they keep going off on tangents. He attempts to go around

the table to get some agreement about the shape and balance of the units but some members had different concerns -

STc: I am appalled by the Reader's introduction. If we can't do better, God help us.

Reader: I'm going to turn to jelly

STc: If we can't make it more exciting, we are doomed, students will vote with their feet.

CTC: Your unit is too long. How do you see it fitting in?

STc: My historical approach is not a separate thing from the content. It integrates the content. I had a lot of practical experience teaching and getting students interested for fourteen years before I lost my job at another university.

STb: It is difficult to know what students think but perhaps we can find a solution.

Lec: These arguments are at cross purpose to the task of agreeing a structure. Perhaps we should have just a core of concepts in the unit.

CTC: everyone is riding their own hobby horse.

Lec: perhaps STc could write the introduction.

STc: I accept that suggestion entirely. I just made a frank and honest attempt and sat down and wrote this off the top of my head. I did not have time to think it out completely.

Lec: Your historical approach is valid. Even maps are provisional. They are just a representation of how people think things are but their thinking changes.

CTC: if not to say biased.

At this point, a little over an hour into the meeting, the atmosphere of the group is completely altered, from a state of tension to calmness and willingness to follow the chairman's suggestion to go around the table and discuss structure. STc attempts to say more about an integrated approach but CTC firmly stops him. A little later STc attempts to talk about his professional contacts outside but CTC cuts him off. STc makes a comment about "the rarefied atmosphere of the University of Bletchley" in evident irritation. At the end of the meeting the chairman says they have made an excellent start to the course with so many chipping in on the discussion but they will not spend two hours again just talking about structure of a few units.

3 - (April)

The revised drafts of units discussed last time are being considered, except for the Reader's who expects to provide his soon.

BBC1: your request that we put on a workshop for T.V. presenters is impractical and unproven.

Lec: I do not know what the BBC is up to.

CTC: lets go around the table again and concentrate on the bits of the units which are available.

STa: I received the units too late to read them so I have no comments.

SL: I'm not going to comment on something that will be so drastically changed (referring to the Readers late materials) Also, I think the proposed TV is too marginal to the materials.

CTC: what is your progress? (to the Reader)

Reader: there may be some delay because I have to go out of the country to attend a colloquium.

Lec: multi-authored units are like production camels. The longer they are left without one person being responsible, the more problems there will be.

SL: I used the format we adopted for the old course for the part I wrote (he gives some details) but I do not want to do all the talking.

CTC: (to STc) who gave you written comments on your first draft?

STc: only you but three others on my second. I may have over-reacted to their comments.

SL: the students will not want to know anything about what you wrote beginning at page 13.

STa: I don't agree. It sets a framework and you admit there is not enough space available to do it in length.

STb: this is the nature of the subject but it is no big deal.

Reader: I agree with SL, we ought to go easy on the historical perspective.

SL: some of the historical materials ought to be made optional materials, STc has gone too far.

STc: I am aware that I have put the history in a nut shell in a few pages. It is perhaps over dramatic but personalities are important in distilling the debate.

Reader: what drum are you beating?

Discussion returns to precedents established in the old course and the chairman eventually expresses some frustration about the continual references to the past.

Lec: we should not spoon feed the students

Lec: (impatiently) lets get off the bicycle shed and back to the units.

At this point there is a dramatic change in the emotional climate to one of calm discussion about the overlap of materials.

4 - (May)

The chairman observes that the Reader has re-written less than half of his materials but has had them all re-typed. He suggests that they speed things up. The Reader's approach was to talk the students through with great care and that he had the basic kernel right.

SL: I agree but we need a unified draft, one designed by a committee is not useful.

Lec: I don't agree, there is some riding of a hobby horse here.

Reader: This is an old bind of details which is not appropriate now.

Soon after BBC1 introduces some general points on TV programmes 1-3. There is some frustration and anger about what he proposes and concern about his relationship with the team, some of whom are feeling peripheral because of a lack of interaction with the producers.

BBC1: I would welcome detailed comment on my proposals.

CTC: At first do something dramatic on TV but not a cooks tour. It ought to relate closely to university level work.

5 - (June)

Four members arrive late, even after the meeting begins 15 minutes late. BBC1 arrive one hour later. It is the last meeting before a summer break of two months. Initially they are concerned about the old course - what was done in the old course, what was the policy as so on until the chairman becomes impatient.

CTC: this is getting nowhere.

Lec: I suggest we follow what was done in the old course about assessment.

STa: you cannot measure things identically.

Lec: in any case, decisions about assessment are premature.

Lec: that's how things work.

CC: (impatiently) can we follow the chairman's suggestion that two of you prepare something for the next meeting.

CTC: does anyone else have anything to say?

Discussion continues on about scheduling production until the chairman comes to the next problem.

CTC: it appears that the materials written by STd have been lifted directly from a well known text.

But the team is still pre-occupied with the old course.

Reader: was the way it was done before good, how much detail was there in the old course?

SL: not as much detail.

CTC: how well did related materials go down in the old course?

CC: (impatiently) can we come back from the old course. It is irrelevant. We need to get on with the business here.

Continued discussion of materials is strikingly different with everyone speaking to the centre of the table rather than to each other. STd, in response to the chairman's earlier criticism says -

STd: I will restructure my unit. It is quite clear that I've gone quite adrift. I will have another draft in three weeks.

6 - (September)

Unfortunately I missed this meeting but from accounts of it discussion of most of the remaining first drafts went well.

7 - (October)

Discussion of second drafts begin. This is the first meeting since the BBC moved from London to a new production centre a few minutes walk away. Because the chairman had written the draft being discussed he asks two other members if they will chair the meeting but they decline. The chairman summarizes the written comments he has received on his draft. STc mentions the name of some well known person and the chairman responds -

CTC: cut the name dropping.

Lec: I think a mirror should be included with the new microscope.

CTC: I assume students will have mains electricity.

Robert: I think your statement of the obvious may be experienced as sarcastic but I think it was an attempt at humour.

They continued on with a detailed discussion of the units.

Robert: I think there is considerable concern here about what could be described as inside/outside issues and this is symbolized in your discussion.

At this point BBC1 comes in. The meeting is being held in a new location this time and the BBC has also just moved.

BBC1: this is a nice easy place to find.

His arrival or comment is not responded to.

8 - (November)

In addition to discussing the course materials, they comment on a paper I had written for them and circulated a week earlier (Importance of three tasks for a course team) Some of their comments are summarized in their minutes -

There was considerable discussion of Robert's paper. Points raised included:

(i) a lecturer thought that course team problems were frequently mundane, organisational ones rather than the psychological or emotional ones emphasized in the paper...it might be useful to probe into these.

(ii) another lecturer said she found some of the concepts interesting but felt some of the terms would not be familiar to course team members.

(iii) the chairman said he would find it useful to have some constructive comments in the areas where Robert could see problems. Robert suggested that part of the chairman's responsibility was for the health of the group and, although the group worked well, some individuals were having difficulties, felt isolated and they needed to give them support.

It was agreed that I would continue to attend course team meetings and that I would bring further view and analyses to them. Later the chairman commented that I might have experienced a more difficult reception if some members had been present who were more critical about looking at group relations (absences included the Reader, SL, STa, STc, STd, BBC1)

9 - (December 10)

The reader brings in a script for BBC2 to read and says, jokingly to BBC1 -

Reader: its not for you, not until you grow up.

CTC: I've heard you have arranged some special meetings outside between you without telling the team anything about it. The course team should be informed.

BBC2: such arrangements are within normal operating procedures. It is expedient for subject groups to bring recommendations to the entire course team.

CTC: I accept the spirit of that but the team ought to be better informed.

SL tables some notes on a TV script. The chairman looks surprised and STa says that her responsibility for co-ordinating the units is impossible when she is left out of communications between authors and producers. There is no response to this as the team begins a general discussion about units and TV. After this goes on for awhile I say -

Robert: STa is being left in an isolated position. You would rather not confront the issues that she has raised.

There is no reply to this. BBC2 asks three times about deadlines for broadcast notes.

CTC: this will be looked into.

For the next 45 minutes they discuss what could go into the T.V. programme.

Robert: as experts you could go on discussing what could go in the programmes all day, if not all week. It seems a bit of an indulgence, an avoidance of a confrontation with the concerns of STa which are still not answered. Those issues have to be addressed before specific details are relevant.

CTC: I disagree. Our discussion has been useful. I have a better idea of the TV programmes now.

STa: it is a set up situation. My opinions make no difference to what is decided.

The team now addresses all the points she raised. At the end of the meeting the chairman says to me, in a friendly way, "we will make a scientist of you yet".

10 - (December 16)

As discussion of TV begins -

STa: this is still a set up situation, my views will make no difference at all to the final outcome.

Robert: I think the atmosphere of this meeting is completely different to the previous one. However, the materials appear to have been clearly modified in response to STa's comments. The relation between TV and text is being addressed and that all views have evidently been given a fair hearing.

STa: I accept that.

CTC: you do tend to take a rigid position.

STa: I'd say sceptical.

STb: (with good humour) its only your paranoia.

Robert: the chairman is perhaps making more of an historical statement, that rigidity was the dominant characteristic of the previous meeting and this one seems to be one of compromise.

11 - (January)

Someone asks if STc and STd will be there since they are supposed to begin the comments on the draft units. The chairman says that he put a copy of the units in STd's brief case and one of the lecturers comments "that is a certain way for

him not to see it". No one mentions that STc has not attended the last three meetings although he attended all but one of the previous meetings. STd has only attended two out of nine meetings.

CTC: I suggest we move discussion of TV forward while we wait for STd.

BBC1: I have nothing on TV so put it in any other business.

CTC: who wants to begin discussing the unit? (it is about a month late)

There is a long pause

CTC: there is a problem of unnecessary specialist terms. Wherever possible they ought to be eliminated.

The author agrees and thinks the number of terms can be halved.

CTC: some of the materials related to the TV programme are too detailed and could be cut.

BBC1: it is important to have these materials in the unit. (he repeats this a number of times in different ways)

Lec: the TV related materials can quite reasonably go into the broadcast notes.

There is no response to this and BBC1 says, more to himself, "the T.V. programme is also thought to be at too high a level.

STb: I am concerned about the level of difficulty

While they continue to discuss this STd arrives a half hour late but no one acknowledges his arrival. STc never comes. The author, however, is no longer in agreement and says he is confused about what is being suggested. He makes the following points a number of times -

(a) to explain things more fully would increase the problem of length and would therefore be the opposite of what was being asked.

(b) it is not clear what to leave out and he wants suggestions about what to leave in

(c) it is not clear how it could be taught better

(d) he has written this draft in response made on the first draft

The chairman asks STd what comments he has.

STd: very few since I received the unit in the post only this morning.

The author takes a specific passage and asks how it can be changed. One of his colleagues takes a few minutes to explain in detail how his approach can be altered. The rest of the team just listen.

Robert: (to the author) your colleague's compliment is the only one I have heard. This team needs to learn something about commitment. How one comes to feel a member of the group is not the responsibility of just one member but of the entire group. A group needs to constantly affirm belonging and to make

markers along the way which recognize this. I have no feeling as to what extent the unit provides the necessary information. It is clear that it was difficult to write. It is late and evidently more successful in writing for the course team than the students. I think this has been a difficult experience for the author. He has done all this work but nothing good is said about it. Perhaps you feel somewhat confused with the beginning which may have felt like an attack?

The author says that "it is not a problem, merely a situation of swings and round-a-bouts. They push you and you push. Its all a game. I feel OK about it and it was not my unit originally. Perhaps I feel paternalistic about it".

Robert: I may have experienced your request for detailed explanation of how to write in another way. You are an experienced author who is known to write well and your request may have reflected some discomfort about the situation.

The author then summarizes what he understands of the different recommendations and indicates that he will try to accommodate them.

Robert: this is an unusual procedure. There is usually a sense of more control or organization of the discussion with an easier or less critical beginning. Also the chairman usually summarizes the comments but you have assumed this role, perhaps from a need to control what you feel is a difficult situation. The failure to recognize roles and tasks encourages less attentiveness. For example, STD had not received the unit but also evidently made no effort to check on this. This is not a criticism of him personally but a reflection of the expectations the group has of its members. Also sitting at the end of the table with the two BBC members feels like being on a shelf of rock which is about to break away. Apparently a decision has been made implicitly during this discussion about moving materials from the unit to the broadcast notes. This has not been acknowledged nor has BBC1's concerns been recognized. Evidently no one heard his comments about a difficult outline. Considering that 'signposts' to TV in units have been such an issue in the previous two meetings, it is surprising it is not acknowledged here.

The author's helpful colleague says that the materials associated with T.V. would be in the broadcast notes. Another lecturer says that we do not need to stop and discuss TV now.

Robert: do not misunderstand me. I am not suggesting that you discuss TV but simply acknowledge what seems to be agreed (covertly). Perhaps 90% of what I say may not be true but it is an exploration with you about other possible views and second opinions.

The author's helpful colleague says, indirectly, that most of what I had said was probably not true.

BBC1 (more to himself) I said less here than any other meeting. Everyone knows that TV is to be discussed later.

BBC1 then leaves the meeting to play squash but has an extended talk with BBC2 in the hall before he leaves.

BBC2: there is nothing to report on TV.

CTC: there is a problem that is new to me. Evidently the co-producers (Americans) want a new programme or its no deal.

CC: I wish this information had been available before.

BBC2: it was around but I've focused on what this course needs.

CTC: it is a BBC problem.

BBC2: we are trying to make all the programmes you want but if extra resources are not available it will be a problem.

A paper on the American TV project is passed around but BBC2 has never seen it. He does not know who originated it. It is in a mid-Atlantic style. No one seems to know what to make of this situation.

12 - (January 28)

Unusually, the professor and BBC3 are present. BBC1 is absent.

The meeting begins with a complaint by one of the lecturers that BBC1 had told him there was no way he could be a presenter on TV.

CTC: I have seen seven minutes of a TV presentation the lecturer made and in my opinion it is better than some of the programmes already made.

The lecturer asks BBC2 directly if it was a reasonable presentation.

BBC2: yes.

Prof: I thought there was an agreement that the BBC would not give us any more problems about selection of presenters for TV. Since the issue has not been solved I would prefer to drop our relationship with the BBC.

BBC3: that would be an extreme reaction and no solution at all. What we need are some procedures for solving this.

Course team members ask BBC3 three time if he will agree to use the lecturer as a presenter. One of them suggests that the BBC have put themselves in a very difficult position.

Robert: your question assumes that it is within BBC3's authority to agree to use the lecturer as a presenter. Is that the situation?

BBC3: it is a negative authority. I could order it but I would be very reluctant to do it.

The argument continues for much longer and with a level of anger that my notes do not begin to convey. In fact, I found it difficult to remember details after the meeting and had to refer to the course team minutes for the following notes - BBC3 agreed that the external consultant should not be the sole presenter and that they were not opposed to another OU presenter. The lecturer in question

said that the external consultant was a friend and he did not want to involve him in this unhappy situation. The chairman summarized their views at the end of the meeting. 1) no academic should be totally dismissed as a presenter 2) the lecturer should be allowed to present part of the T.V. programme although they did not expect this to be a major role 3) if a solution could not be reached they might well consider abandoning the plans for these programmes. It was left for discussions to occur within the following two weeks to resolve the issue.

Meetings 13 - 16

In the next four meetings, February through May, a few moments of conflict were quickly contained and not allowed to disrupt the meeting. It was a period of intensive work in which two thirds of the second drafts were discussed.

In meeting 13 one of the lecturers is strongly critical of STa's draft. The chairman summarizes the criticisms and concludes that what had seemed a massive attack on everything applied only to a few details which could be easily corrected. STa supports the chairman in the subsequent orderly discussion.

In meeting 14 the same lecturer makes very strong criticisms of SL's draft - "I am horrified because the first draft is written, not as a normal teaching document, but more like a post-graduate essay or a consultancy document". Two other lecturers support this view. SL welcomes the many details of criticism and says that is what he wants for a first draft. The chairman obtains a reluctant commitment from the critical lecturer to write a section in his area of expertise. SL complains that he had tried to get such a commitment previously without result.

I did write any notes for meeting 15 which went smoothly. In meeting 16 the same lecturer says he is very unhappy about the third draft of materials and suggests that STa is too involved and perhaps someone else who was more detached could prepare the next phase. The chairman asks if he was volunteering to prepare the handover draft but the critical lecturer declines this request.

Two days after meeting 16 I gave a talk after the department meeting "about the efficiency or otherwise of course teams". Three months earlier BBC3 sent a note to six of his colleagues asking them to reserve time for the departmental meeting "which will discuss the whole process of how course teams work... Robert Nicodemus who has been working with Course Teams for some time now, is going to give a paper and I expect there to be considerable discussion". Minutes of this discussion are included in the main body of this report.

17 - (October)

BBC1 and BBC2 are not present. BBC3 had arranged to attend the meeting 1 & 1/2 hours after it began.

CTC: we cannot approve TV 3 and 4. The opening sequence and failure to use hard hats (a safety measure) was unsatisfactory in TV3. The model is unsatisfactory in TV4.

SL: the lack of hard hats sets a bad example and we have gone on about safety at some length for years. I wonder if the American co-producers will ignore safety standards in their five T.V. programmes.

In the subsequent discussion there is a reference to a model made for another course which did what they wanted but BBC2 said it would not work or, perhaps he just did not want to do it. There are complaints about being excluded by the BBC from planning the design of the model although other producers do encourage contact with BBC designers. The chairman describes an unpleasant confrontation with BBC3 "who marched into my office making disparaging comments about my colleagues. We ended up shouting at each other". The team expresses a number of concerns about - a) what the co-producers might do with the printed materials they had written b) responsibility the team should take for how their materials are used c) suspicion that the BBC was using the OU to attract money and about their motives in the whole enterprise. Although the team approve of the broader dissemination of the course through co-producers they were frustrated by the lack of information. They had to negotiate with the co-producers through a "sharp" Washington lawyer but BBC had direct access to where decisions were made. One lecturer suggested that, in typical American fashion, they would do a "Reader's Digest" on the materials and there was little the team could do about it.

BBC3 arrives.

BBC3: we now have a time deadline in three weeks set by the OU. If the contract with the co-producers is not signed by then the deal will be dropped. I am also worried by a loss of interest by the co-producers. They may withdraw from the deal. I am not prepared to let that happen by speeding things up. I am not satisfied with the leisurely pace at which the OU system operates.

In the argument which ensues for the next 40 minutes, course team members express anger about the relationship with the BBC and with BBC3 in particular who they feel is discourteous, insulting, insensitive and aggressive. BBC3 apologises to the chairman in an exaggerated manner.

CTC: I am not interested in your histrionics

BBC3 tries to find out what they want to get their approval so signing contracts can go ahead. He gets further complaint, criticism and anger. They refuse to give their approval even though they want to support the co-production, especially the wider use of printed course materials.

BBC3 tells them about plans for a person from the co-producers to come to the OU in two months. The members express further anger at more arrangements being made without them being involved. One comments that the BBC seems to operate on the assumption that academics are an inconvenience to the dramatic "news at 10 culture". Because academics have considerable experience at distance teaching they ought to be better used. A final item of irritation is that one of the lecturers has been included on the co-production advisory committee without his knowledge. BBC3 suggests that the whole thing is in evolution and that money, plans or decisions are tentative.

A few days later I took my notes on the meeting to BBC3 to discuss and to get his views. As a result I did delete some items from my notes. It was also obvious to me that my observations only of course team meetings missed other interactions between team members and the BBC. Reading my notes about the earlier part of the meeting provoked BBC3 to write on them with some vigour. He felt the chairman and course coordinator were a very difficult pair. Here is a summary of BBC's written comments - hard hats was a trivial issue...the OU arrangements for co-production are very unsatisfactory...the statement 'marched into my office' is an interpretation, not an observation...we shouted at each other because I felt that direct contact with the chairman would save time... what is the suspicion about?...the team could, through their chairman, had he wished, contact the co-producers direct...

The final three meetings, 18 - 20, proceeded smoothly. I did not write any notes. The final meeting was followed by a celebration lunch.